

Notes from SURF CITY

by catherine yronwode

Dm

"Next month we promise to introduce you to everyone in the office!" said Dean last month . . . just before leaving for New York City on a business trip. Well.

I guess that means I get to write this Surf City, even though I'm neither Jan, Dean nor The Beach Boys.

At least I'm in the office, which is more than I can say for some folks!

Actually, Dean is in an office . . . the New York office of Eclipse Comics, more properly known as Surf City East. New York is where the Business and Circulation departments of this cross-country company are located. Head business-person is Jan Mullaney. Readers, meet Jan . . . Jan, say hello to the readers. "Hi, folks!"

Gee, this is fun! I can make 'em say any darn thing I want 'em to!

Jan's the man who dickers with the distributors, deals with the dealers, raps with the retailers, and most importantly, Signs the Checks. A very important guy in the scheme of things. Jan's also a very talented musician and a professional one at that. When he's not Eclipsing, Jan is pursuing his second career, playing keyboards, producing records and writing songs. It's a busy life for Jan Mullaney.

Assisting Jan is Madelyn Feinberg. The New York office could hardly function without Madelyn. She answers the phone, handles subscriptions and takes care of the business-oriented mail. She also makes sure Jan-Boy doesn't forget to eat or sleep, what with his 48-hour-a-day schedule.

If Eclipse East takes care of business, I think I can safely say that Eclipse West has all the fun. Dean and I run the editorial office here in California. We work with the writers, artists, letterers and colourists to actually produce all the stuff Jan signs checks for and you folks buy.

The editorial office, however, wouldn't be what it is without the assistance of some very fine helpers.

James Shannon, Elgin Lessly and Alice Stockham are the unsung heroes of the Eclipse production department. They are responsible for all of those tiny little details nobody thinks about when they look at a beautifully drawn and printed comic book. Jimmy, Les and Alice handle chores like pasting up the lettercolumns and house ads, running the photocopy machine, getting all stats and typesetting together, checking art for errors (we can't leave the zipper tabs off of Rainbow's boots or the buckles off of Ms. Tree's trenchcoat!), and making sure that every page sent to the engravers is marked with the proper series title and page number. They also sweep the floors, open the mail, forward your letters of comment to the proper writers and artists, and, if we're lucky, make coffee for Dean and me. There is no more thankless task in the comic book industry than doing "production work." Alice, Les and Jimmy don't even ask for thanks. (They do want their paychecks every Friday, but that's a small price to pay for silent, uncomplaining service . . . and occasionally fresh coffee.)

Dean is, as most of you know, the other half of Jan-and-. He's Editor-in-Chief of this entire three-ring circus and that means everything — from the decision

(with Jan) of what to publish and when to publish it, right on down to proof-reading half the books — rests on his furry little head. Dino doesn't sleep much. He's what you'd call a workaholic. As if editorial conferences and general overseeing were not enough, Dean also writes "The Scythe," which appears monthly in Ms. Tree.

Oh yes . . . and he has one other very important function here at Eclipse. Dino, bless his heart, is the self-appointed Guardian of the Fabulous Eclipse Record Collection. No muzak for us! This may be the only comic book company where the happy workers can get behind anything from Hoagy Carmichael's 1927 recording of Star Dust to Carl Perkins' 1955 out-takes of Blue Suede Shoes, with stops along the way for Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys, Jimi Hendrix, or the latest live George Shearing-Mel Torme disc.

Yes, there are Editors-in-Chief who are taller than Dean, Editors-in-Chief who are older than Dean, and Editors-in-Chief who are bigger than Dean around the middle . . . but no where in comics will you find an Editor-in-Chief with a larger record collection than Dean's — and nowhere will you find one who keeps the stereo going all day long and far into the night for the benefit of his employees!

That leaves yours truly to explain what the heck I'm doing here. Yes . . . well, I edit a few books myself (keep your eyes ready for Aztec Ace), do more than a little proof-reading, and I am also the person who runs the Colouring Department. I check all the colour work, oversee the separations made by the engravers, and hold my breath when the jobs go to press for fear something will go wrong. It rarely does, but I have a superstitious feeling that unless at least one person is worried, something really major will happen.

Oh yes, and if I'm left to manage the office in the absence of Our Fearless Leader, I get to do things like writing this here column. I also feed the Guinea Pig.

No lie. Eclipse Comics has an official Guinea Pig. Her name is Barbie Sue. She is an Abyssinian Agouti, and she is very sweet and unpretentious. What else can one say about her? She goes "Vreep Vreep" when she's hungry. She's like, a guinea pig, ya know?

And that, friends, is the low-down on Who's Who at Eclipse Comics. You may not know any more about us than you did before you began reading this, but if you think you do, you can thank — or blame — yours truly,

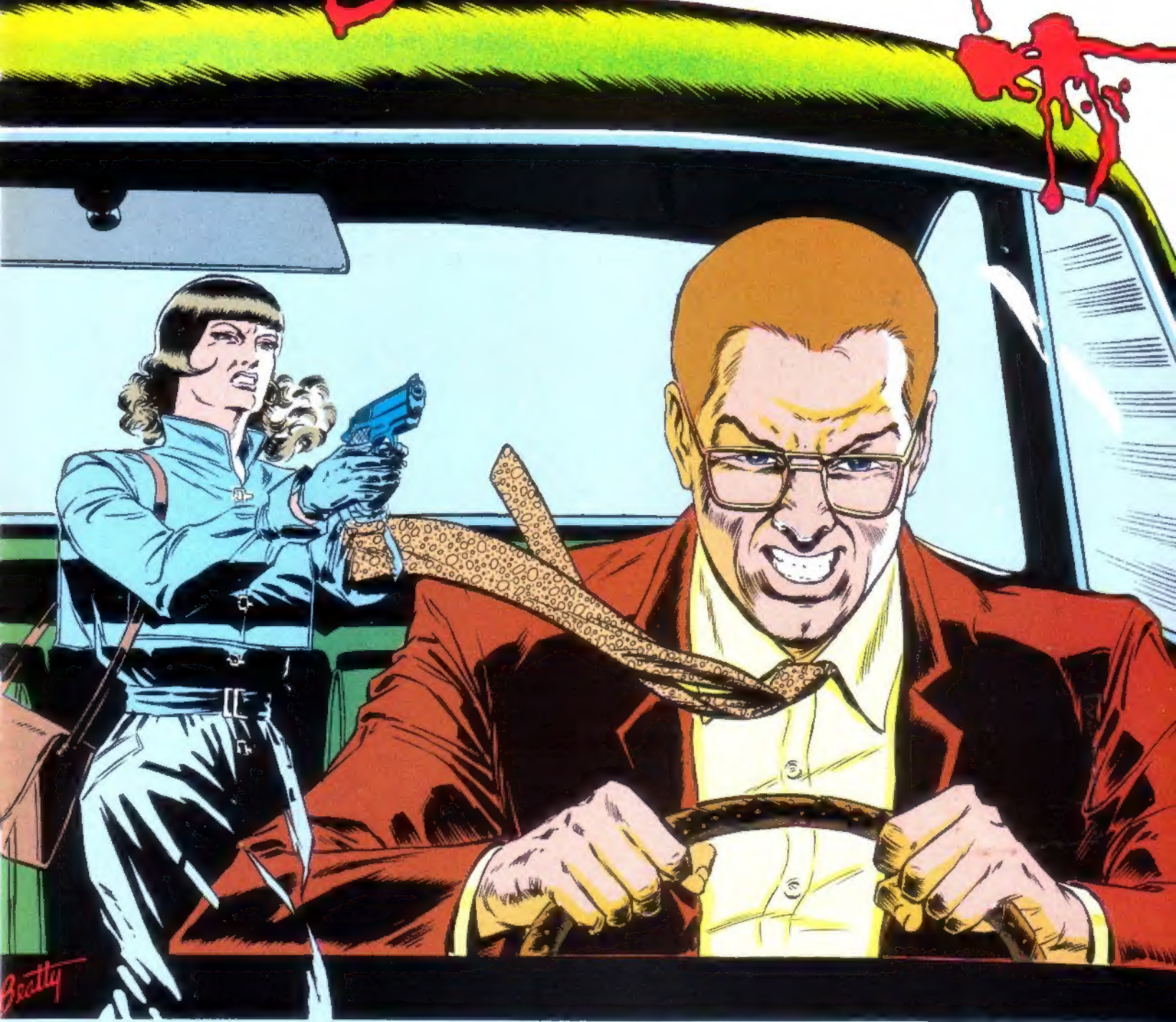
catherine yronwode
editor (and cowgirl emeritus)

FREE COLOR CHART OFFER!! We've given away thousands already, but it's still not too late for YOU to get your own FREE Eclipse Comics Color Chart! This nifty four-pager, with art by Marshall Rogers, will let you in on one of the biggest secrets behind the comics, namely, how we can take four colours of ink and give you 124 different, brilliant hues! To get your FREE chart, just tell us your name, age and the name of the store where you bought this magazine, and enclose a SELF ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE (a large one if you want it mailed flat; it's the size of a regular comic book, remember). Mail your request to ECLIPSE COMICS, Box 199, Guerneville, Calif. 95446.

Mr. TREE™

by Max Collins and Terry Beatty

"TO THE SLAUGHTER"



MS. TREE

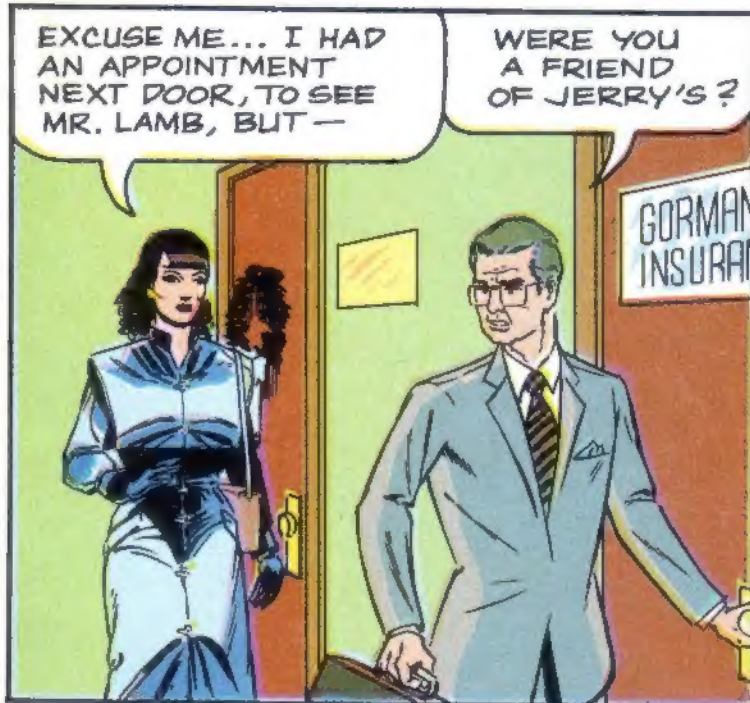
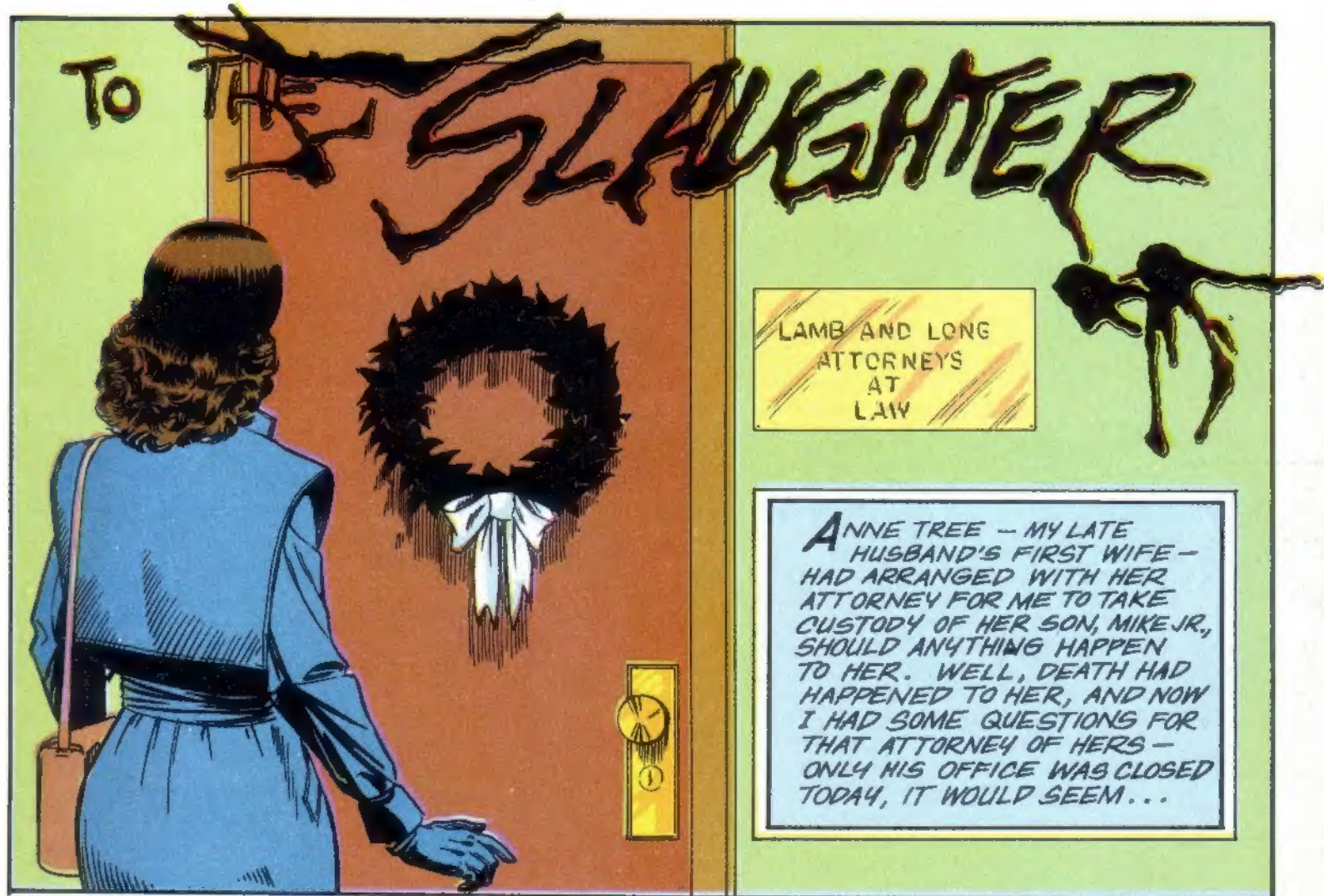
"THE COLD DISH"

© 1983

by Max Collins and Terry Beatty

Chapter

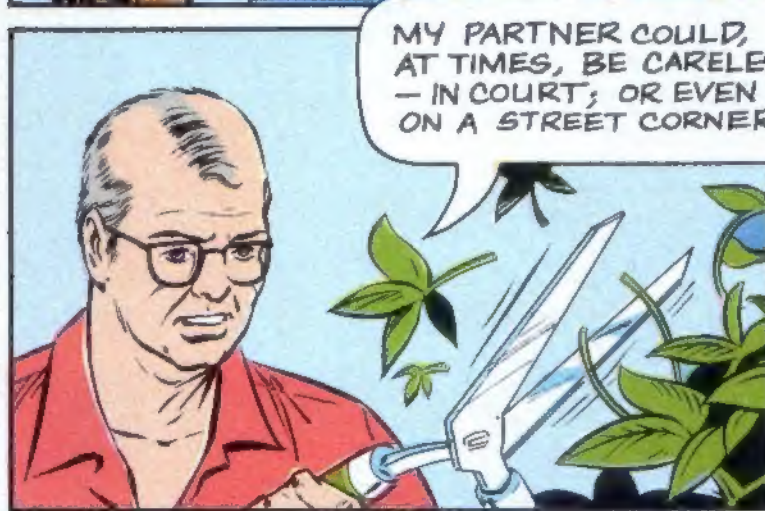
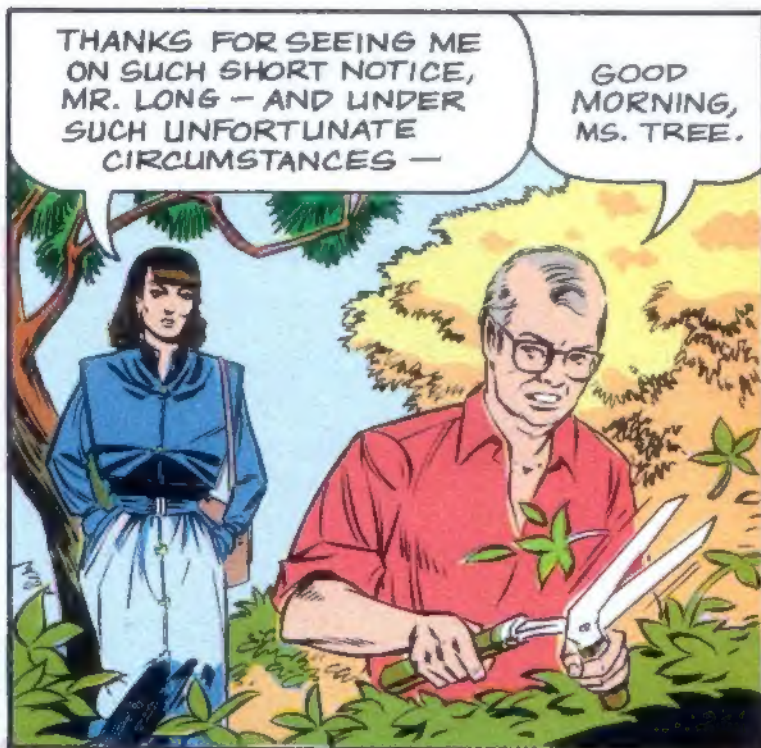
Five



ART ASSIST & LETTERING: GARY KATO

COLORS: DENIS McFARLING

MS. TREE (ISSN 0737-6170) Vol. 1, No. 6, February 1984. Published by Eclipse Enterprises, 81 Delaware Street, Staten Island, NY 10304. Dean Mullaney, Editor. MS. TREE and MIKE MIST (including all prominent characters featured in each story and the distinctive likenesses thereof) copyright 1983 Max Allan Collins & Terry Beatty. THE SCYTHE (including all prominent characters featured in this story and the distinctive likenesses thereof) copyright 1983 Dean Mullaney. TIGER MANN copyright 1983 Mickey Spillane; art copyright 1983 Mike Grell. All other material copyright 1983 Eclipse Enterprises. All rights reserved. Price \$1.50 per copy. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead persons, or real institutions, is intended and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in Canada.



YOU **DO** REALIZE THAT ONE OF HIS CLIENTS, ANNE TREE, HAD BEEN KILLED THE DAY BEFORE — IN A NEARLY IDENTICAL MANNER.



AND YOU **DO** REALIZE ANNE TREE'S DEATH WAS A **MURDER** — A MURDER MOST PROBABLY ORDERED BY DOMINIC MUERTA? MOB BOSS OF BOSSSES?



I DO.

WELL — WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME?

DON'T COME ON STRONG WITH ME, YOUNG WOMAN. I'M A LAWYER. I **BELIEVE** IN THE LAW —



WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

IT MEANS I BELIEVE IN THE LAW — OF THE LAND. NOT MOB JUSTICE, OR VIGILANTE JUSTICE, OR ANY OF THE BASTARDIZED FORMS OF JUSTICE PEOPLE TAKE IT UPON THEMSELVES TO METE OUT.



YOU PUT ME IN **THAT** CATEGORY, DO YOU?

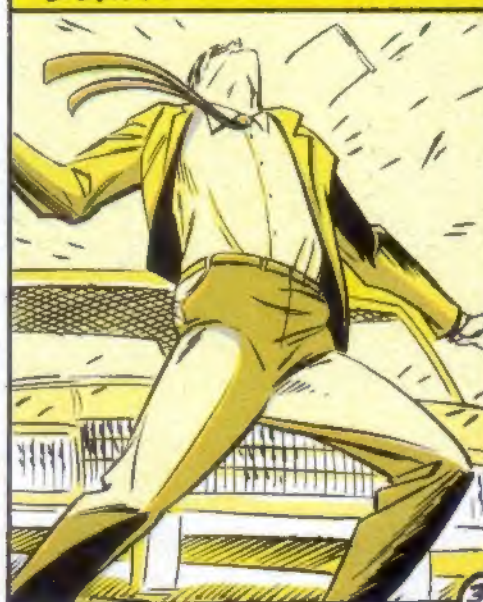
FRANKLY, YES.



I **WILL** TELL YOU THIS MUCH: JEROME WAS SERVING HIS LATE CLIENT'S INTERESTS WHEN HE WAS KILLED...



"HE WAS DELIVERING A SEALED ENVELOPE TO THE AUTHORITIES, WHEN HE WAS STRUCK DOWN."



I WAS ABLE TO PUT THE REST OF IT TOGETHER, BY PUMPING LT. RAFF VALER, OF HOMICIDE —

DID YOU GET A DESCRIPTION OF THE DRIVER?

YES, AN EXCELLENT ONE — HERE'S THE POLICE ARTIST'S SKETCH —



HOW ON EARTH DID YOU GET THIS **EXACT** A LIKENESS?

HE STOPPED HIS CAR — SLAMMED ON HIS BRAKES AND GOT OUT TO CHECK THE VICTIM —



"THE WITNESSES SAY HE SEEMED CONCERNED — HE CALLED OUT FOR HELP FOR THE MAN — BENT OVER AND CHECKED HIS CONDITION —"

CALL AN AMBULANCE!
HURRY!



"THEN HE CLAIMED HE WAS GOING TO MOVE HIS CAR —"

I GOTTA GET MY CAR OUT OF THE STREET — STAY WITH HIM, BUT FOR GOD'S SAKE GIVE HIM AIR!



AND THEN HE DROVE OFF — PANICKED, I GUESS.

PANICKED?
DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE READING THIS AS A LEGITIMATE HIT-AND-RUN?



WHAT ELSE **COULD** IT BE?
WHY WOULD A HITMAN STOP THE CAR AND GET OUT AND PRETEND TO BE CONCERNED?

DON'T YOU **GET IT?**





I WASN'T WORRIED—
WELL, ANYWAY
NOT **PARANOID** WORRIED—



I WAS KEEPING MIKE JR.
HIDDEN AWAY SAFELY
IN HIS FATHER'S OLD
BACHELOR APARTMENT—



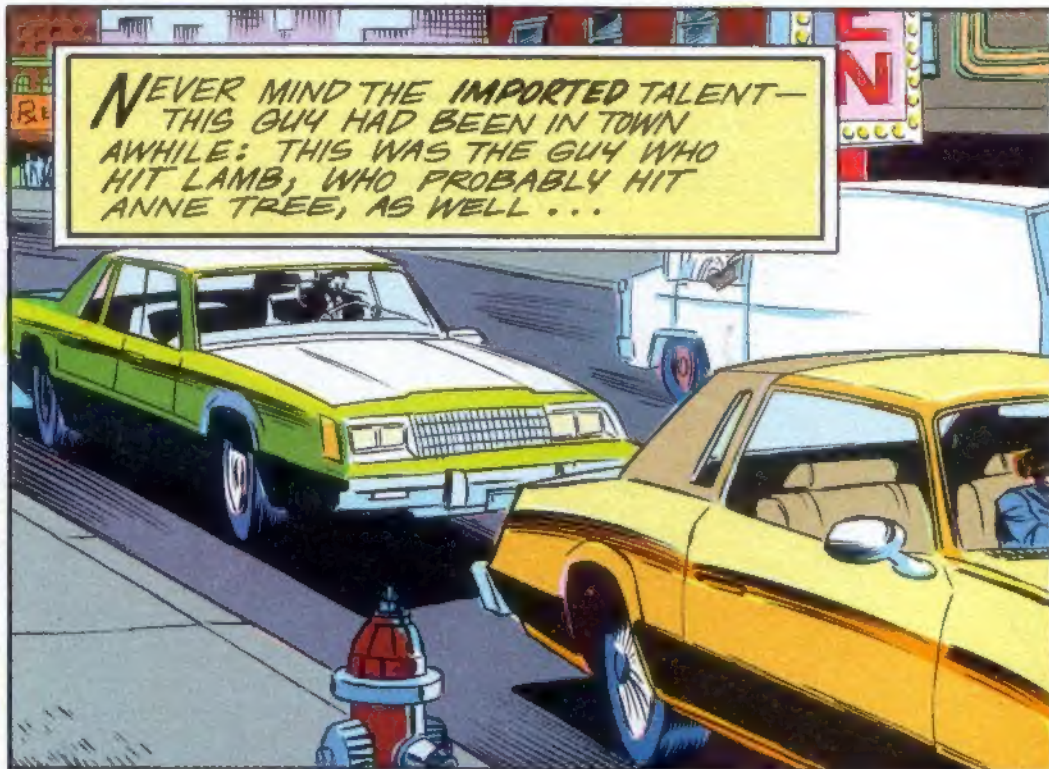
HIS LIVE-IN-TUTOR,
FOR THE DURATION, WAS
BRYAN HAND—WHOSE
EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
INCLUDE **WEAPONS** AND
MARTIAL ARTS...



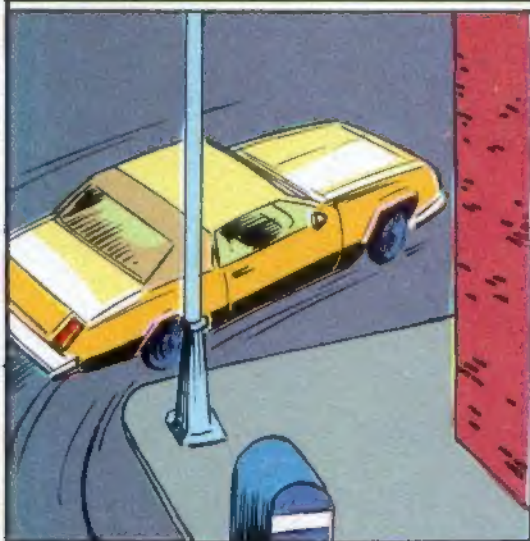
I FIGURED I DIDN'T
HAVE ANYTHING
TO WORRY ABOUT—
TILL I GLANCED IN
MY REARVIEW MIRROR—



NEVER MIND THE IMPORTED TALENT—
THIS GUY HAD BEEN IN TOWN
AWHILE: THIS WAS THE GUY WHO
HIT LAMB, WHO PROBABLY HIT
ANNE TREE, AS WELL...



I TURNED WITHOUT
SIGNALING, TO GET
SOME DISTANCE BETWEEN
US; BUT I DIDN'T PICK
UP SPEED. I HOPED NOT
TO TIP TO HIM THAT I'D
SEEN HIM...



I WASN'T ABOUT
TO LEAD HIM TO
WHERE I HAD
MIKE JR. HIDDEN
AWAY—



SO I DROVE TOWARD
THE BUILDING WHERE
MY OFFICE WAS;
PULLED INTO THE PARKING
RAMP NEARBY—



I PARKED AND STARTED
TOWARD THE ELEVATORS
ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF
THIS FLOOR OF THE RAMP—



WALKING —



WAITING —



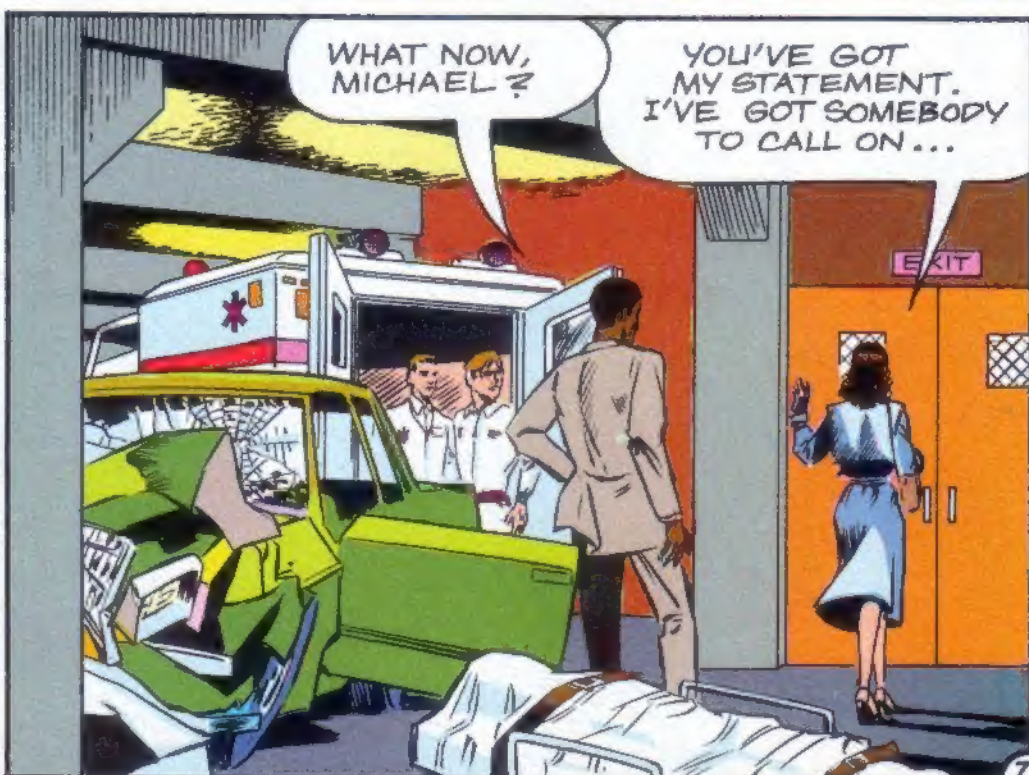
LISTENING —



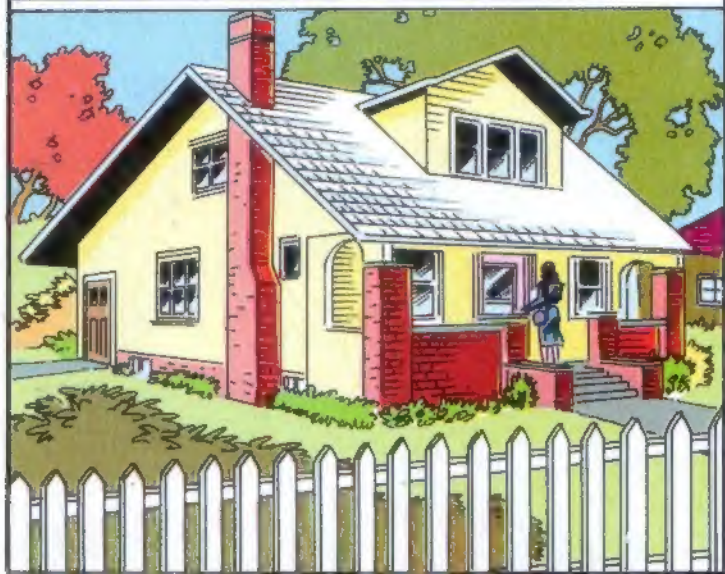
AND THEN HE TURNED
THE CORNER.



AND I TURNED.

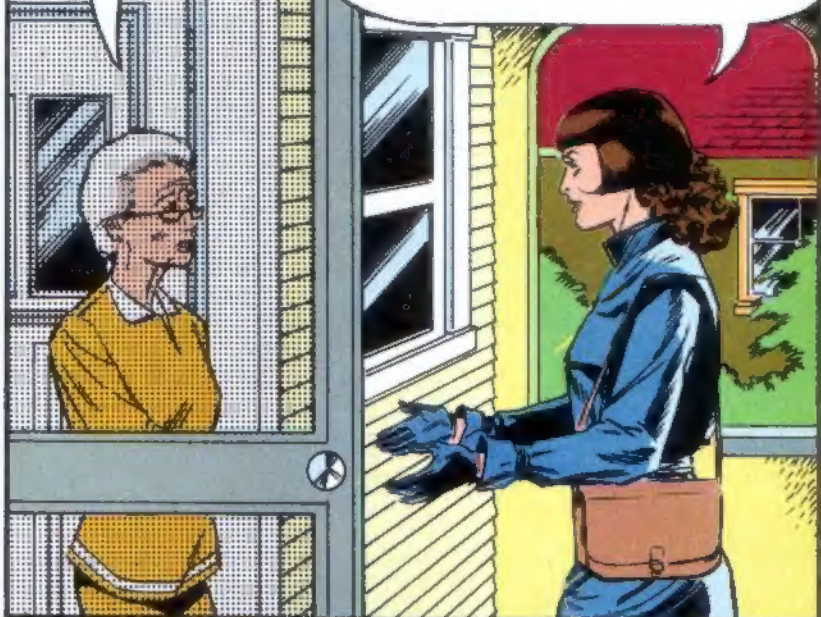


ANNE TREE'S PARENTS LIVED IN A NICE HOME IN A QUIET NEIGHBORHOOD — THE ONLY THING MISSING WAS NORMAN ROCKWELL'S SIGNATURE IN THE CORNER —



MS. TREE!
THIS IS
UNEXPECTED!

I SHOULD'VE CALLED
FIRST — BUT I WAS
AFRAID YOU WOULDN'T
SEE ME —



PLEASE COME IN —
MY HUSBAND ISN'T HERE...
HE'S ONLY SEMI-RETIRED.
HE STILL GOES IN TO WORK
FROM TIME TO TIME.

HE'S AN
ACCOUNT-
ANT,
ISN'T HE?



THAT'S RIGHT.
CAN I GET
YOU SOME
COFFEE?

NO THANK YOU — I
WON'T STAY LONG —
THIS ISN'T ABOUT
MIKE JR., NOT
DIRECTLY ANYWAY —



I HOPED MRS. BOOKER
WOULD PUT ASIDE THE
CRUSADE SHE AND HER
HUSBAND WERE WAGING
AGAINST ME, FOR
CUSTODY OF MIKE JR.,
LONG ENOUGH TO HEAR
MY STORY... AND
SHE DID.

AND NOW HER ATTORNEY'S
BEEN KILLED THE SAME
WAY?

YES.



THIS IS
DREADFUL...

MRS. BOOKER—
HAVE YOU EVER
HEARD OF
DOMINIC
MUERTA?



I'M... I'M AFRAID
I HAVE —





HE'S A GANGSTER,
ISN'T HE?



THAT WAS LIKE
SAYING, "REAGAN
— HE'S IN POLITICS,
ISN'T HE?"

YES, HE'S A GANGSTER.



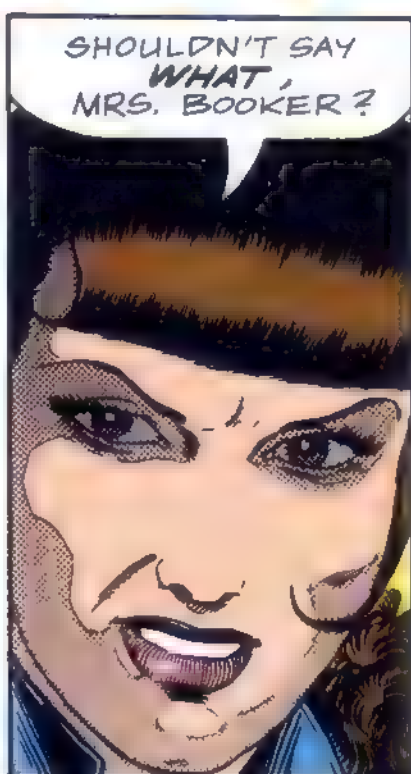
HER NAIVETE DIDN'T
SEEM FEIGNED;
WHATEVER THE CASE, I
FIGURED I'D COME UP
EMPTY — BUT JUST AS I
WAS LEAVING...

MS. TREE,
YOU MIGHT
TRY JASON —

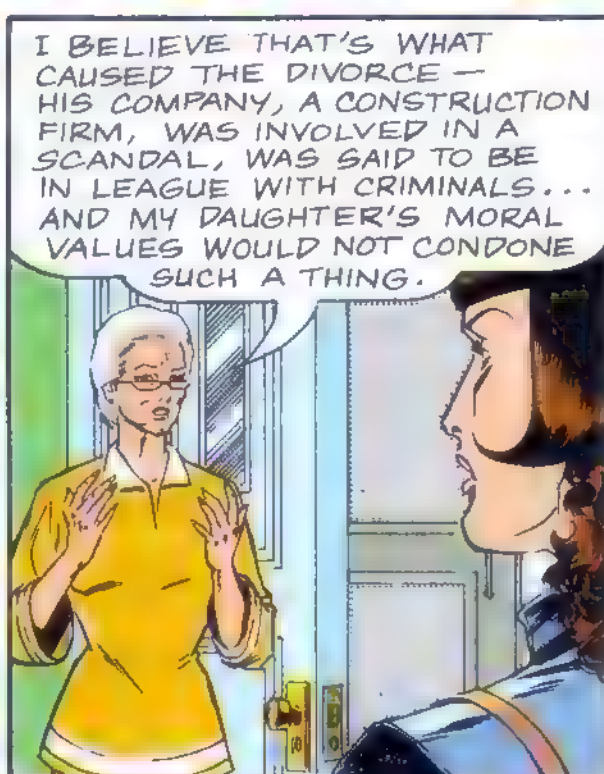
WHO?



JASON EDWARDS.
HE HAD SOME SHADY
BUSINESS CONNECTIONS,
AND IN FACT... THOUGH
I DON'T KNOW THE
DETAILS... WELL, I
SHOULDN'T SAY.



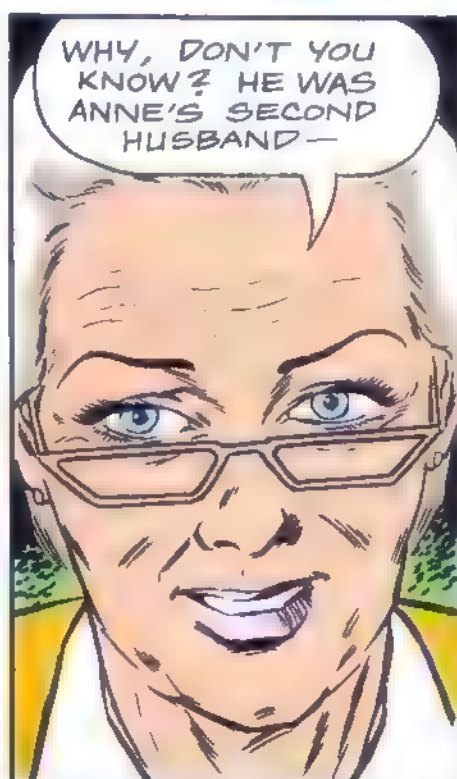
SHOULDN'T SAY
WHAT,
MRS. BOOKER?



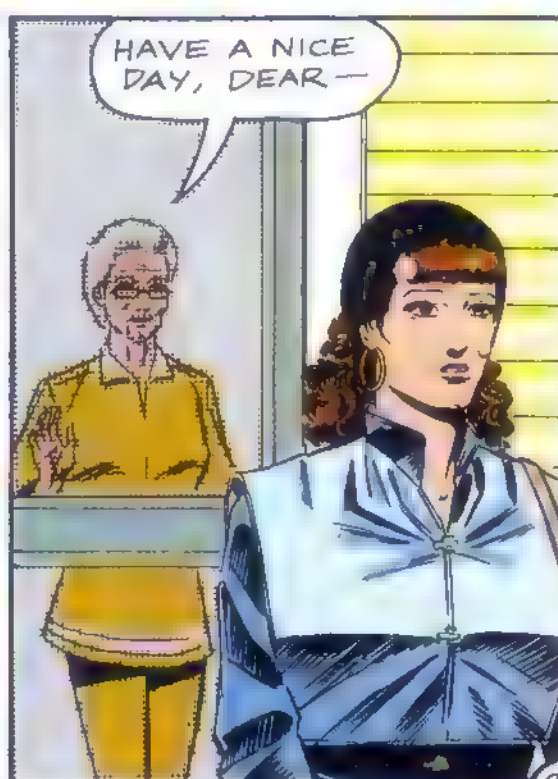
I BELIEVE THAT'S WHAT
CAUSED THE DIVORCE —
HIS COMPANY, A CONSTRUCTION
FIRM, WAS INVOLVED IN A
SCANDAL, WAS SAID TO BE
IN LEAGUE WITH CRIMINALS...
AND MY DAUGHTER'S MORAL
VALUES WOULD NOT CONDONE
SUCH A THING.



DIVORCE? WHAT ARE
YOU TALKING ABOUT?
WHO *IS* THIS
JASON EDWARDS,
ANYWAY?



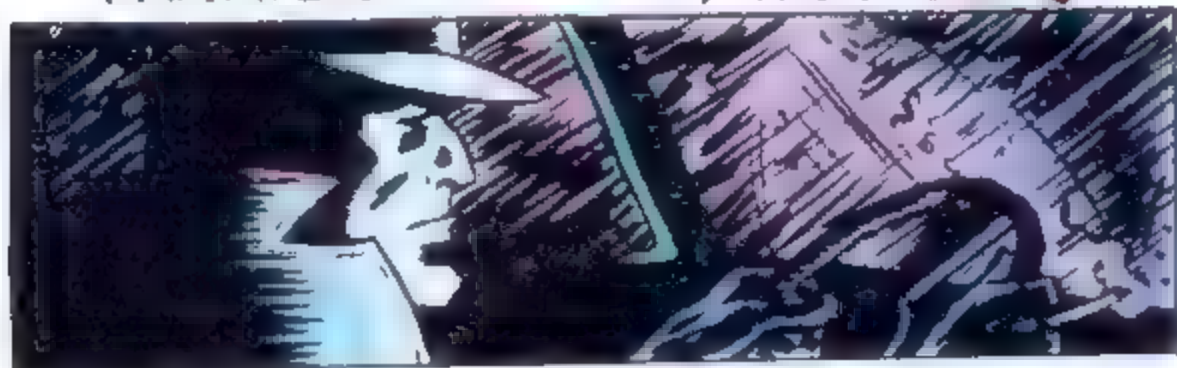
WHY, DON'T YOU
KNOW? HE WAS
ANNE'S SECOND
HUSBAND —



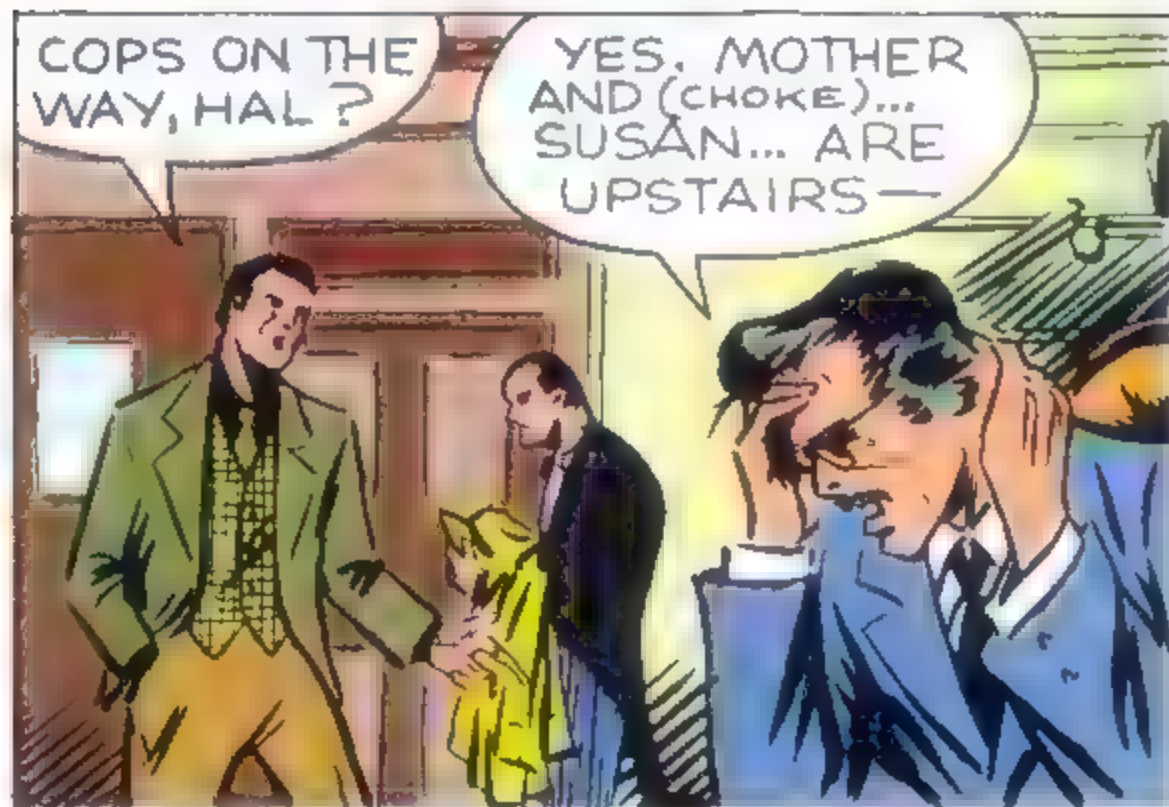
HAVE A NICE
DAY, DEAR —

CONTINUED THIS ISSUE

"Death Takes A Powder"
A MIKE MIST MINUTE
PRIVATE EYE MIST-ERY

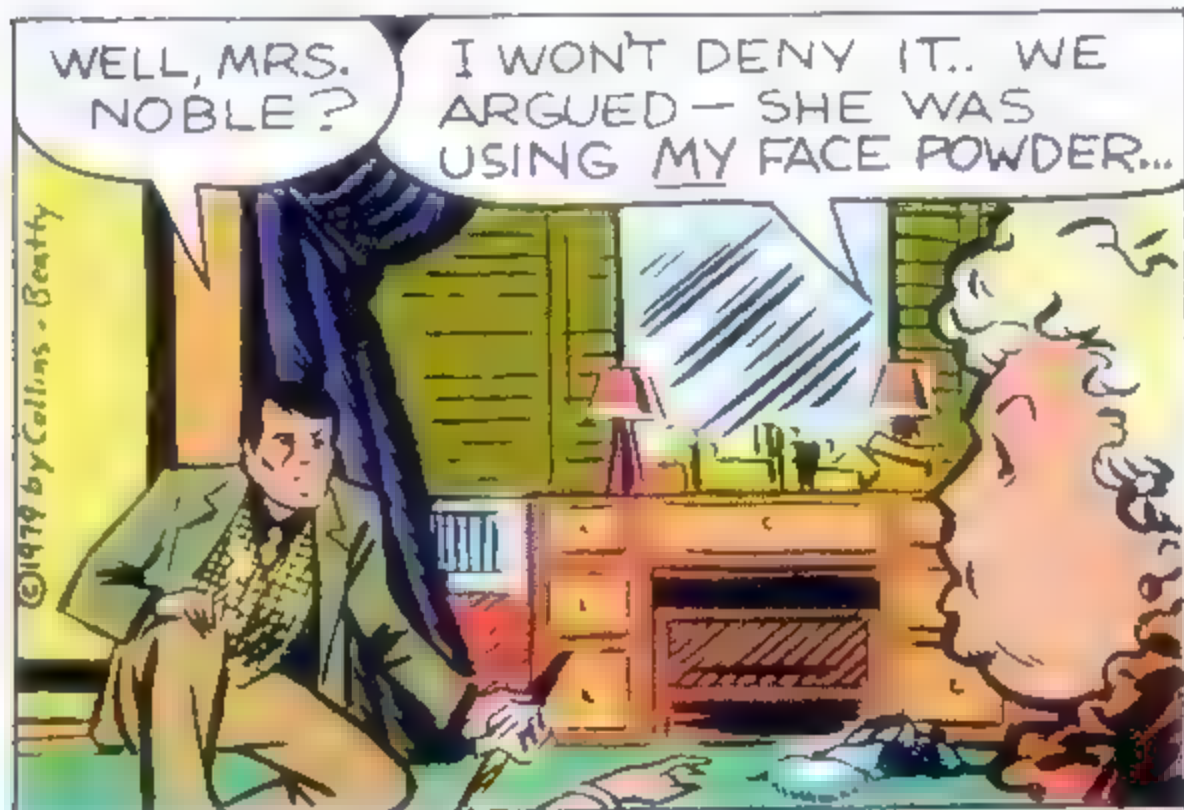


"MY RICH PAL HAL NOBLE'S WIFE,
KILLED BY HER OWN MOTHER-IN-LAW
IN SELF-DEFENSE



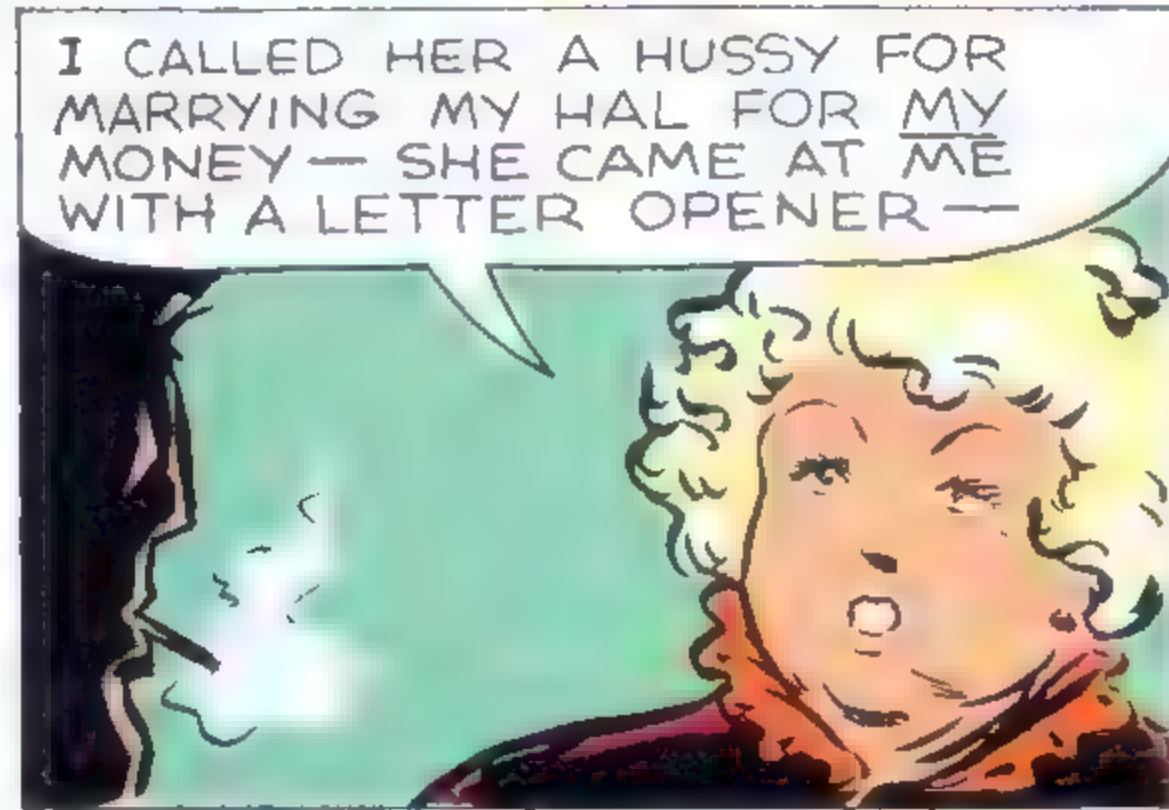
COPS ON THE
WAY, HAL?

YES, MOTHER
AND (CHOKE)...
SUSAN... ARE
UPSTAIRS—

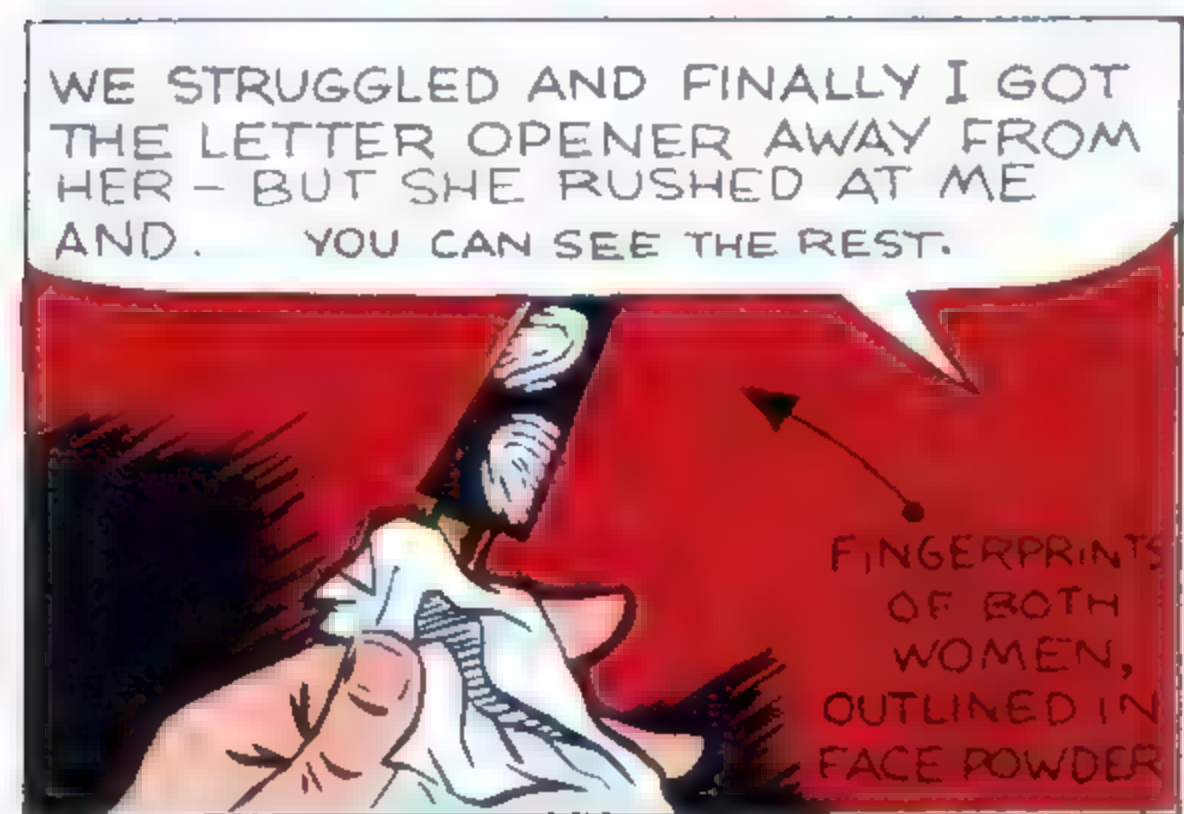


WELL, MRS.
NOBLE?

I WON'T DENY IT. WE
ARGUED— SHE WAS
USING MY FACE POWDER...

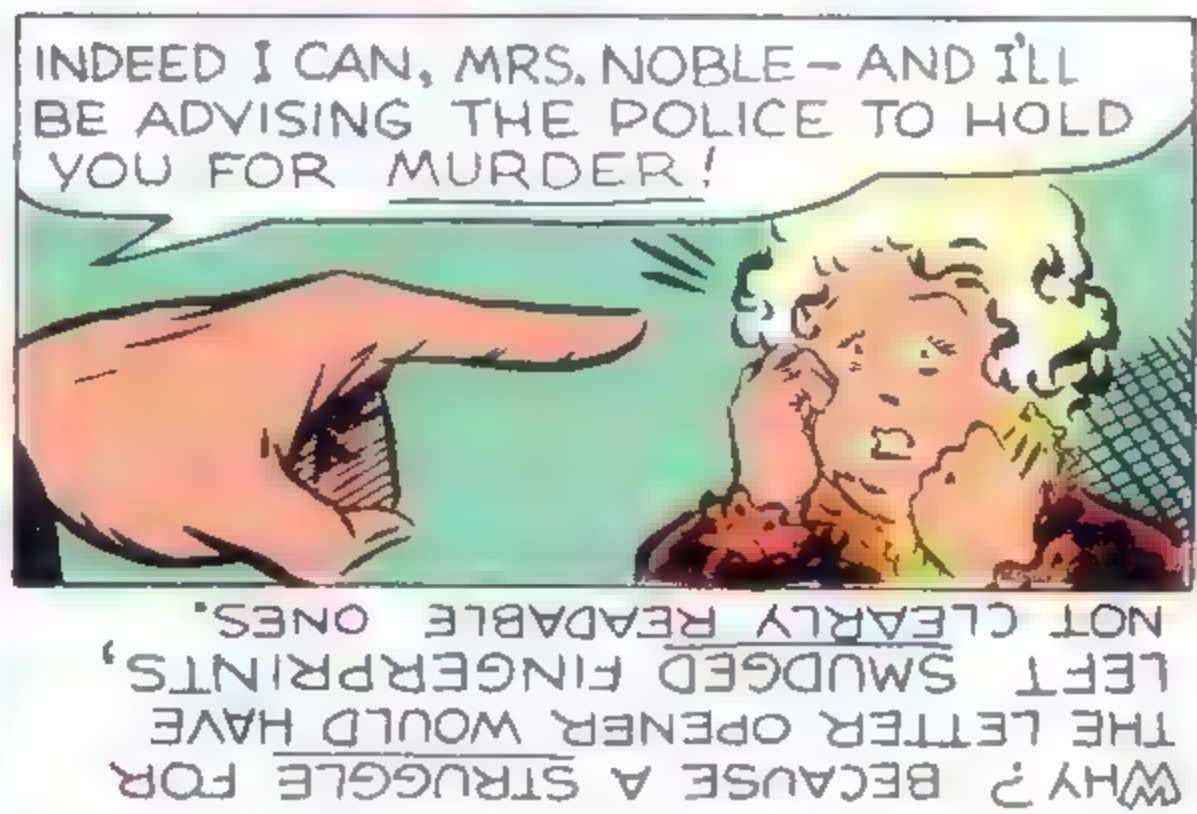


I CALLED HER A HUSSY FOR
MARRYING MY HAL FOR MY
MONEY— SHE CAME AT ME
WITH A LETTER OPENER—



WE STRUGGLED AND FINALLY I GOT
THE LETTER OPENER AWAY FROM
HER— BUT SHE RUSHED AT ME
AND... YOU CAN SEE THE REST.

FINGERPRINTS
OF BOTH
WOMEN,
OUTLINED IN
FACE POWDER



INDEED I CAN, MRS. NOBLE— AND I'LL
BE ADVISING THE POLICE TO HOLD
YOU FOR MURDER!

WHY? BECAUSE A STRUGGLE FOR
THE LETTER OPENER WOULD HAVE
LEFT SMUDGED FINGERPRINTS,
NOT CLEARLY READABLE ONES.



WHAT IS THE MYSTERIOUS SECRET
BEHIND THIS MONTH'S "MINUTE
MIST-ERY"? FOR THE ANSWER,
TURN THIS PAGE UPSIDE-DOWN.

Reprinted here for the first time, having been
omitted from Eclipse's MIKE MIST collection.*
this page, "Death Takes a Powder," is the very
first MIKE MIST, dating from the feature's
original run as part of the weekly COMICS
PAGE, syndicated nationally from 1979-80.
*MIKE MIST, a comic book reprinting 38 of
my earliest cases, in glorious black and white,
is available for \$2.00 postpaid from Eclipse
Enterprises, 81 Delaware Street, Staten Island,
New York 10304.



Eclipse Comics
P. O. Box 199
Guerneville, California 95446

Dear Max Collins and Terry Beatty,

I wanted to let you know that **Ms. Tree** is really prime; the art is terrific, the story is grabbing. Though I had seen her only once before, in a friend's *Eclipse*, I subscribed when I heard she was coming out in her own book. I also have a t-shirt on the way, so that others can see what they're missing.

For ten years, I've been buying comics, and until I discovered the so-called "alternative" companies, I thought nobody could touch Marvel and DC. I'll challenge either of them to come up with anything as good as **Ms. Tree**, or any of about three other "alternative" titles I've come to love, among them a book about an aardvark prime minister and another about an Energy Man from the stars (any chance of Michael Tree meeting Michael Mauser?).

By the way, there is something **very** appealing about a comic that does **not** come out of New York City.

Donald G. Lee, Jr.
Havana, AR

Our friend Joe Staton, *E-Man* artist/writer/co-creator (who also doesn't live in New York), has expressed an interest in doing a **Ms. Tree** crossover; we're complimented and willing. Major stumbling block is an obvious one: **Ms. Tree** doesn't exist in the same super-hero universe as **Mauser** and **E-Man**. Of course, there's always an *imaginary* story . . .

Max (and Terry too but he doesn't answer the letters)—

I very much enjoy **Ms. Tree**. If any comic book can be said to be unique among its contemporaries, it is **Ms. Tree**. I realize it would not be unique to the short story or the novel, but for 1980s contemporary comic books, it is quite unique.

One of the main draws of the book for me is its pacing. I enjoy pacing that takes its time to tell the story thoroughly rather than quickly. In this rush, hurry-up, get-it-done society, I enjoy sitting down and reading a book that can slowly yet effectively tell a story. While others may complain that the pacing is slow, that is exactly what endears me to the book.

Another main draw of the book is of course Terry's art. Terry's pure and clean style is exactly how I like art. I like backgrounds that are sharp and polished and Terry delivers this quite well. He is also very capable of capturing subtle emotions. I enjoy very much the wordless panels that only contain a facial expression/reaction to a situation.

Is Terry related to John "Captain America" Beatty? Their styles are remarkably similar and since they have the same last name . . .

Well, here's to many years of **Ms. Tree** adventures—yes, many years.

Jim Jackson
Brooklyn Park, MN

Terry is not related to John Beatty—though he says he hopes John is asked that question as often as he is.

The complaints about pacing were for the *original* six-part serial in *Eclipse* magazine—and it is my feeling that those complaints had more to do with the long wait between issues (a bi-monthly book that was often delayed) than with our eight story-crammed pages. One of the problems with doing a serialized mystery is that if the episodes appear too far apart, the readers will forget what's gone on before. We think the monthly schedule will remedy that. In a recent *Comics Buyer's Guide* review, Don Thompson pointed out that we deliver *more* story in a shorter number of pages than most comic books. A recent comic about a

non-costumed heroine, acclaimed as "cinematic," opens with a four-page sequence in which a woman is hit by a car; in **Ms. Tree** #4, there is a sequence in which a woman is hit by a car—in four panels. You're welcome to like our book for its "slow" pacing, Jim—but what I *think* you're liking is our longer, more complex stories.

Dear Max and Terry,

After reading "Death Do Us Part" in **Ms. Tree** #1-3, I must say that I'm really pleased with the way this comic is taking shape. On the whole, **Ms. Tree** is as entertaining as any comic book I know of.

The "Ms. Tree" feature is, in truth, the only reason I buy this comic. "The Mike Mist Minute Mist-eries" are fun, the Frank Miller "Famous Detective Pin-Ups" are pretty good, and "The Scythe" is okay, but, for me, "Ms. Tree" is what makes this one great comic book. As I've mentioned before, I find Ms. Tree's character to be appealing and enjoyable, and fairly realistic as well. She seems to have some dimension and depth to her, unlike many comic book characters. Max, I hope you continue to develop her character and don't let her just lapse into being a stereotype. So far, your writing has been very good, plotting as well as scripting. You have a concise, straight-forward style that goes well with Terry's simple, clear art.

Speaking of which, Terry, your art is a great change of pace for me. I mainly read Marvel and DC comics, and your art is just so different from the art I'm used to that I find it a real treat.

The final two chapters of "Death Do Us Part" were very interesting. The pacing was a little rushed in my opinion, but I suppose with only 16 pages every other month you can't really afford to slow down much. I wasn't too surprised to see Patrick turn out to be a killer, but Dr. Kassel's involvement in all this was a shocker. That's the kind of devious plot twist I like to see in a detective story.

One small item I can't quite believe, though, is Ms. Tree killing Dr. Kassel at the end of the story. That's really too unrealistic to be believable, since in real life she would probably go to jail for that. Still, I have to admire her for having the ability to get tough when the need arises, and for sticking to her word about killing the killer when she found him.

All in all, I am quite happy with **Ms. Tree**, and I hope that you guys stick with this book for a long time. Also, while I'm thinking of it, I really hope Eclipse will publish "I, for An Eye" in one book soon, because I would really like to read it, being Ms. Tree's first appearance—but I can't afford to buy the back issues of *Eclipse Magazine*.

Congratulations on going monthly, and keep up the good work.

Mark Pruitt
Searcy, Arkansas

Thanks for the many nice (and perceptive) comments. Let me answer a few of your questions, and deal with a few of your concerns . . .

Since you find our pacing a bit rushed, and as you can see by the letter before yours, some other readers find our pacing slow, perhaps you can understand why writers and artists have to trust their own instincts, in such matters. I do think the extra page per chapter (there have been 18 pages of "Ms. Tree" in every issue beginning with #4) helps us stretch out somewhat; the eight-page length was limiting. Also, monthly status allows you to read us more often, and, as I've said, some of our pacing problems had to do with our mystery stories being spread out over too

long a period of time. With only a month between issues, the clues, characters and conflicts will be more fresh in your mind. It also lets us do occasional set-pieces, like the raid on Muerta's mansion in issue #5; since an action sequence like that does not push the story forward as far as a chapter dealing with Ms. Tree investigating, we had avoided such sequences. But with more pages and monthly frequency, we can afford the luxury of an action set-piece. This current story will, in fact, conclude with one (in issue #8).

You mention the Frank Miller pin-ups, and an explanation or two is overdue—namely, the absence in #5 of a pin-up. Going to monthly status has made it impossible for Frank Miller, in a busy schedule that includes his *Ronin* for DC, to come up with a pin-up for each 'n' every issue of *Ms. Tree*. For that reason, we've asked some guest artists to fill in, including this issue's pin-up Mike Grell, of *Warlord*, *Tarzan* and *Jon Sable* fame. Mike is an old friend who shares the Collins/Beatty enthusiasm for things Spillane—hence, this month's "Tiger Mann," with "Morgan the Raider" soon to come. The pin-up feature will, then, not always be by Frank Miller—and, in some cases, will not appear at all; let's call it an irregular feature

It's gratifying that you (and so many other) readers were fooled (and liked being fooled) by the double-twist ending of "Death Do Us Part." As I attempted to explain to a correspondent in SWAK last month, Patrick was something of a red herring, albeit a guilty one. As for Ms. Tree most likely going to jail in real life, I must point out that Dr. Kassel was reaching for a gun when she shot him, which made it possible for her to get off on a self-defense plea—and you may recall, having seen #4 by now, "The Cold Dish" begins just after Ms. Tree has been cleared of any charges. Our stories grow out of each other, and there *will* be ramifications from Ms. Tree's actions as things progress. Don't rule out the possibility of her going to jail for her vigilante-type tactics in the current story . . .

Finally, we hope to collect "I, for An Eye" in a trade paperback one of these days, possibly in color. There's a possibility that "Death Do Us Part" would be in that same book. We think "Ms. Tree" would work for a more general audience than the direct-sales comics market, and hope to put together a trade paperback that might find its way into the major book chains. Whatever the case, "Eye for An Eye" will almost certainly be collected within the next year or so, in *some* format.

Dear Eclipse,

Re: *Ms. Tree* #3

I do not care what Gary Groth and the *Comics Journal* say. Max Collins is a good writer and Terry Beatty is a good artist. I have not seen such a blending of talent since the Moench/*Day Master of Kung Fu*.

"Ms. Tree" is like any good detective novel. The clues are there buried beneath the surface, just waiting for the reader to dig them up.

"The Scythe" is also nicely written and drawn. His series has the potential to overshadow the lead. Thanks for giving Ellis Goodson a chance

In closing, I just want to know if SWAK means "Sleeping with a Killer" or "Swatted with a Kitten."

Steven Rea Thomas,
Warrensburg, Missouri

As we finally revealed in last issue's SWAK, the initials stand for "Sealed With a Kiss." Using those initials as an onomatopoeia for the sound of Ms. Tree smacking a bad guy with her gun is meant to wryly suggest the tough-and-tender mix we strive for with the feature.

Dear Eclipse,

How 'bout more pin-ups of *Ms. Tree*?! The picture on the back cover of *Eclipse Monthly* was a knockout!

Barry Carroll,
Austin, Texas

If the writer of the feature can unabashedly plug his artist, I'll agree wholeheartedly with you, Barry—Terry outdid himself with that pose (on the "This Woman Against the Mob" ad that ran all over the place in various *Eclipse* comics a few months back). If our readers would like, we could certainly cook up a pin-up or two—possibly even a paperdoll. That's just silly enough to appeal to all of us (including a certain woman editor associated with one of the features on this magazine).

Dear Max,

I recently purchased a copy of *Ms. Tree* #1. I really enjoyed it, so now it looks like I'll have to track down a copy of #2! Frankly, I'd rather have the whole thing in one nice 68-page comic at a higher price! I've never liked comics with less than 52 pages

Phil Vandrey,
Evanston, Illinois

Phil's letter arrived in October (the month during which this SWAK is being written, incidentally) so by now he's got quite a bit of catching up to do. But his comment about having the whole story in one book allows me to reveal that it has all along been our intention to collect the various serialized "Ms. Tree" stories in volumes; however, unless this comic book is supported by readers who get a kick out of reading the stories in serialized form, the collections won't happen.

Hey:

Ms. Tree is different. I love P.I.s, cloak and dagger, the whole bit, so I picked up *Ms. Tree*. Nice storytelling. I like the writing, although the art is rather juvenile compared to what I've come to expect from modern comics. *Ms. Tree* is a mysterious woman, but not quite sexy enough. The covers are very colorful and pleasing, however.

Zapper,
Fayetteville, TN

I've discussed our approach to the art on "Ms. Tree" often in these columns, but I will say that comments like Zapper's—that Terry Beatty's art isn't like "modern" comics—are on the decline. Also, comments on the Beatty art on which Gary Kato has contributed his expert assisting are very positive, indeed. I feel the art is constantly improving, and at the same time fans are growing to like the more straight-forward, traditional approach we try to bring to both the art and the writing.

We have consciously avoided a "good girl art" approach to "Ms. Tree." Zapper is in a minority, here: most of our readers indicate they *do* find *Ms. Tree* sexy. But it's more important to us that they find her a flesh-and-blood, credible, interesting character. Those looking for female detectives who take on-camera showers for no other reason than to provide visual enjoyment to male readers (and possibly male cartoonists drawing such female detectives) will have to look elsewhere.

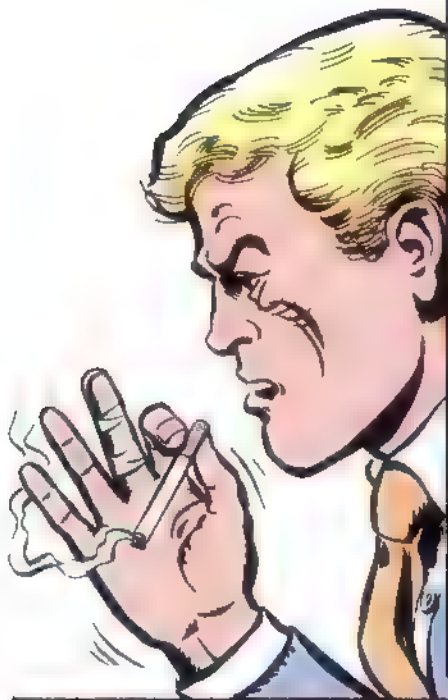
Unabashed Plug Department: *Ms. Tree* writer Max Allan Collins is also the author of a current hardcover novel from St. Martin's Press, *True Detective*. The massive, 350-page novel is set in Chicago in the early '30s; its hero is private detective Nathan Heller, who encounters such real-life personalities of the day as Eliot Ness, Frank Nitti, George Raft, and FDR. The centerpiece of the novel is the assassination of Mayor Cermak of Chicago, and the climax takes place at the 1933 World's Fair. Illustrated with 18 period photos, *True Detective* has been given advance kudos by such major figures in the mystery field as Mickey Spillane, Donald E. Westlake, Lawrence Sanders, Bill Pronzini and William DeAndrea. The book is available at (or through) any major bookstore, including mystery bookstores. Autographed copies are available by mail from Robert and Phyllis Weinberg, 15145 Oxford Drive, Oak Forest, IL 60452 (\$14.95 plus \$2 postage/insurance).

THE SCYTHER

in "Here's to Your Illusions"



DEAN MULLANEY • WRITER
ELLIS GOODSON • PENCIL ARTIST
WAYNE TRUMAN • INK ARTIST/LETTERER
DENIS MCFARLING • COLORIST
CAT@YRONWODE • EDITOR



"WELL, YOU KNOW THAT I'VE BEEN UNDER A LOT OF PRESSURE TO SELL THE BAR... AT FIRST I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY SUCH HEAVYWEIGHT STRONGMEN WERE COMING AROUND TO SEE ME.



"BUT WHEN I RAN INTO WARREN FROM THE CHOIR LOFT BAR, I FOUND OUT THAT HE'D ALSO BEEN PAID A VISIT BY THE FACE'S 'COLLECTORS'."



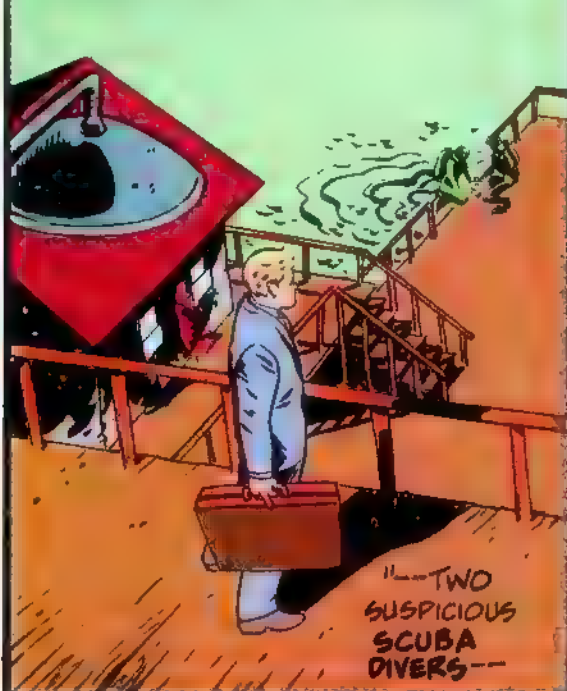
"I CALLED UP ALL THE AREA BUSINESS OWNERS. WARREN AND I WEREN'T THE ONLY ONES THEY'D APPROACHED. I PROPOSED THAT WE FORM A MERCHANTS' ASSOCIATION."



"APPARENTLY THE FACE ISN'T FOND OF MERCHANTS' ASSOCIATIONS THE NEXT MORNING I GOT MY FINGER BROKEN."



"I DECIDED IT WAS A GOOD TIME TO TAKE A VACATION... BUT, AS I WAS LEAVING, I SAW SOMETHING ODD--"

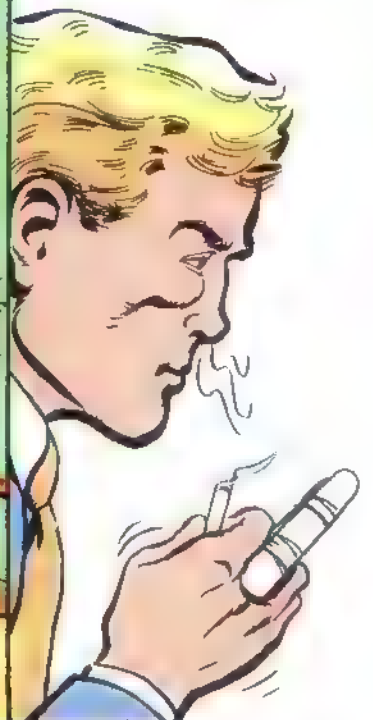


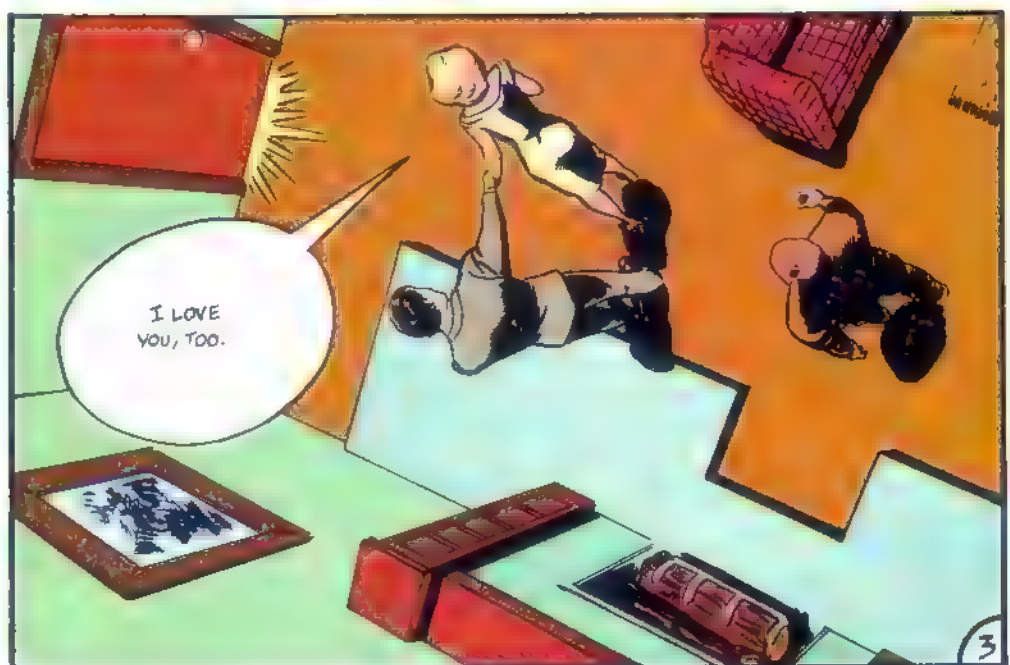
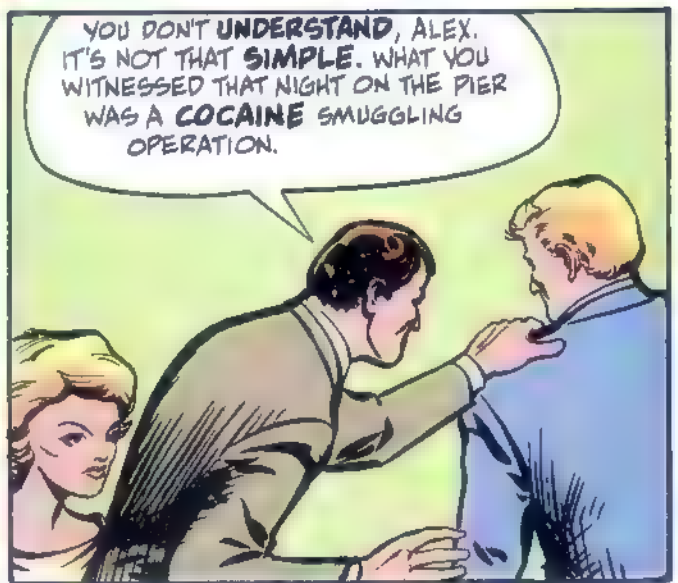
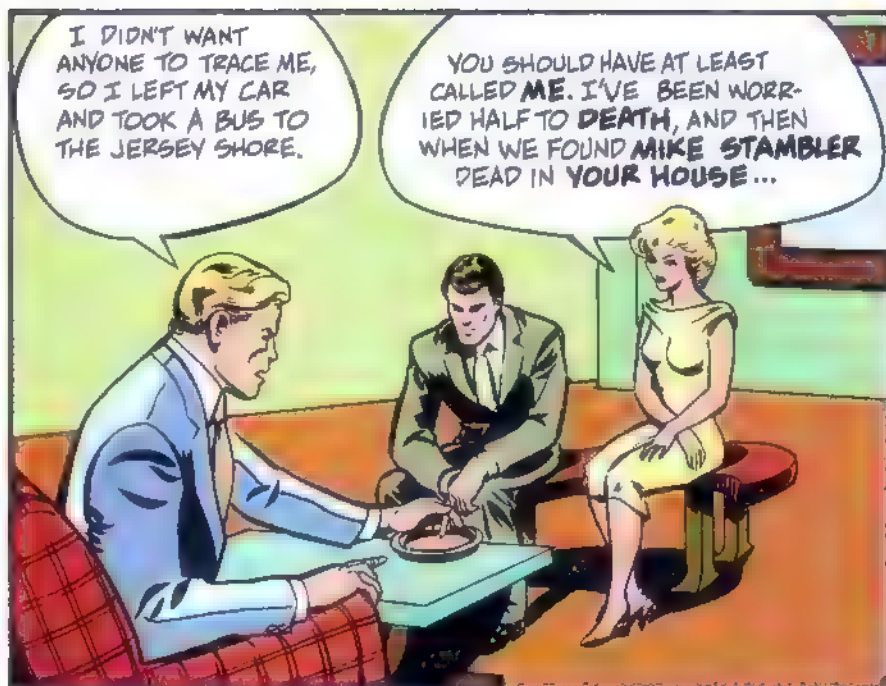
"--TWO SUSPICIOUS SCUBA DIVERS--"

"--AND A WOMAN DRAPED IN A RED CLOAK, WATCHING THEM FROM THE SHADOWS. ✱"



"✱ WE ALL RECOGNIZE RUBY LITH AS THE HEROINE--OR IS THAT THE VILLAINESS?-- FROM LAST ISSUE. --ed."





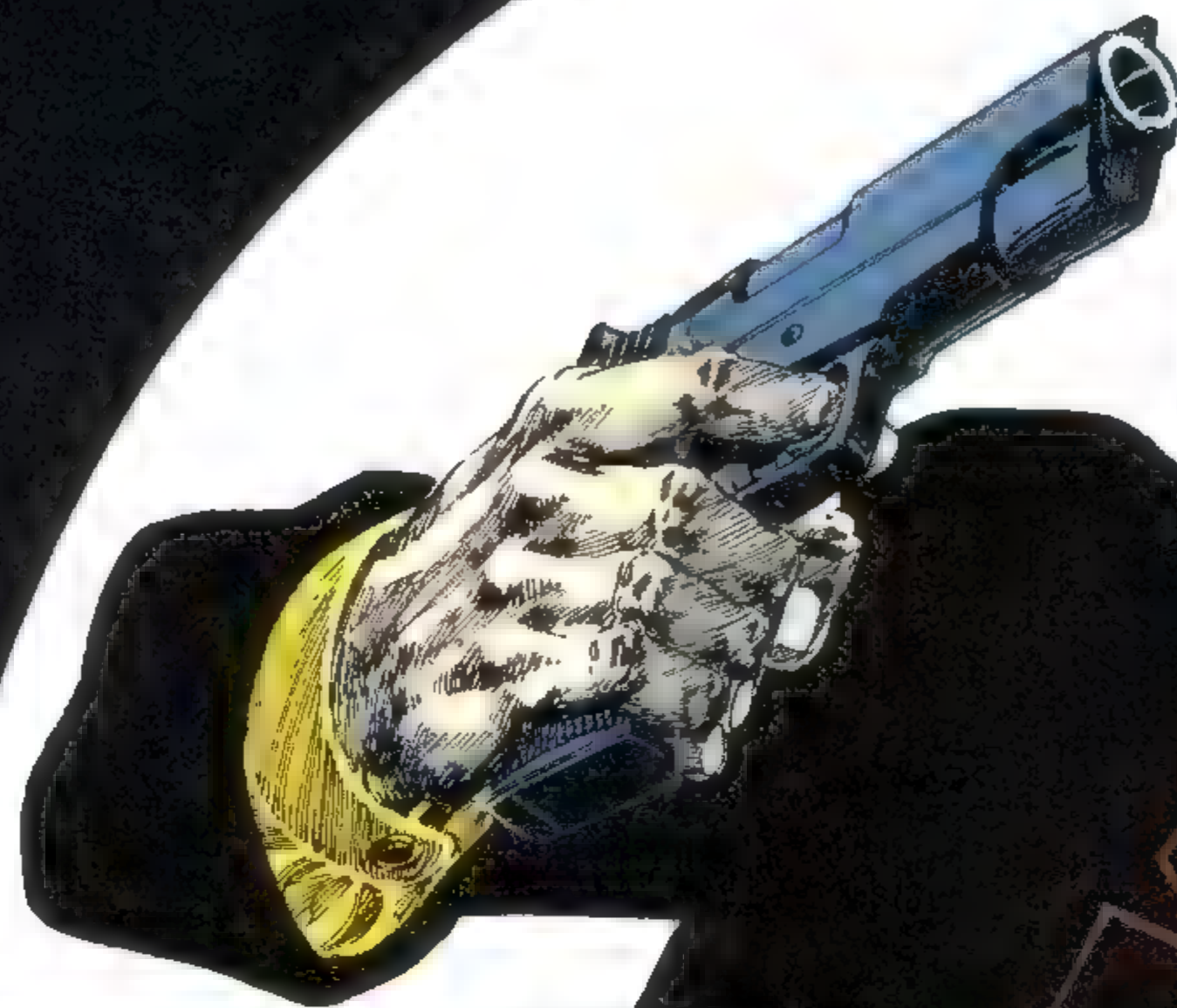
Tiger Mann

Tiger Mann — Mickey Spillane's "answer" to Ian Fleming's James Bond — works for a super-secret organization supplying him with money and technology beyond Mike Hammer's reach. Tiger's boss is ultra-rightwing billionaire Martin Grady, whose "Group" is a privately-financed espionage organization, working for patriotic purposes. Tiger — who operates out of New York and, like Mike Hammer, packs a .45 — is a master of counter-espionage so feared he's been placed permanently on the KGB's "A" list, making him a walking target with a constant open contract on his head.

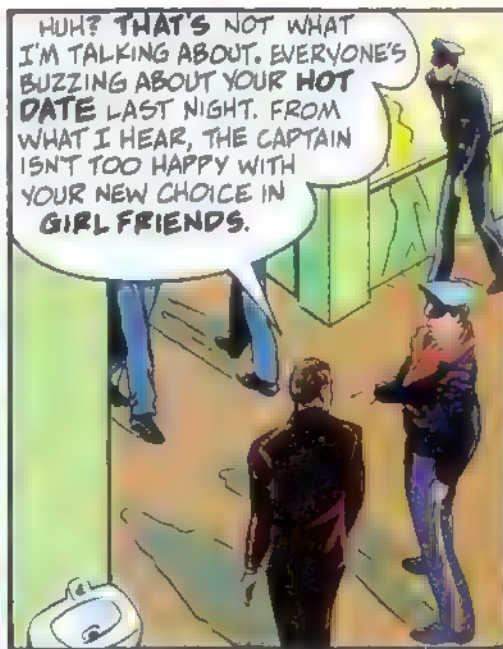
Only four Tiger Mann adventures have been recorded to date: *The Day of the Guns* (1964), *Bloody Sunrise* (1965), *The Death Dealers* (1965) and *The By-Pass Control* (1966). But in these four Tiger tales, the sleuth/spy rivals his literary brother Mike Hammer for rough-and-tumble action, and his first adventure, *The Day of the Guns*, is Mickey Spillane's personal favorite among his non-Hammer adventure stories. It is also one of his most dramatic love stories, as Tiger encounters the mysterious Rondine — the spy who loved him, and tried to kill him, back in World War II — and who has now returned some twenty-some years later, as beautiful — and possibly as deadly — as ever.

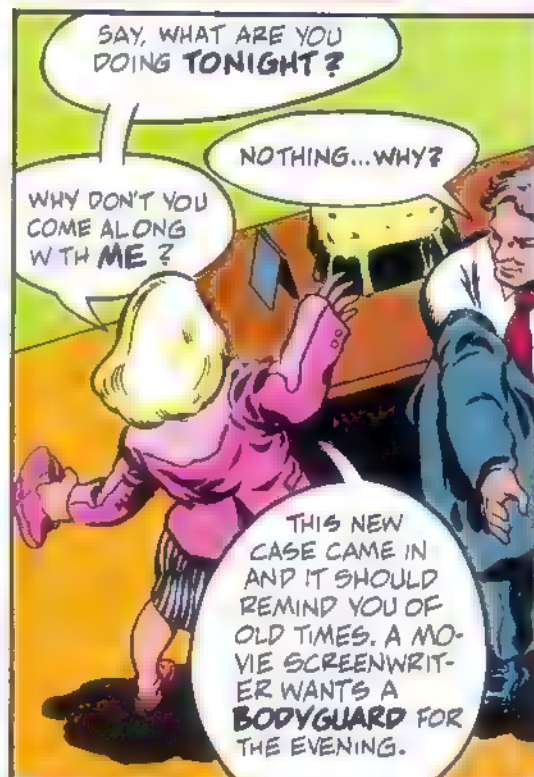
Based on material in the book *ONE LONELY KNIGHT: MICKEY SPILLANE'S MIKE HAMMER* by Max Collins and James Traylor, forthcoming from Popular Press, Bowling Green.

A Mike Grell Detective Pin-Up



MIKE GRELL
©83





MEANWHILE, AT THE D.A.'S OFFICE...

HI, KIM. IS IT SAFE TO COME IN WITHOUT GETTING RAKED OVER THE COALS?

SURE, ROGER. HAVE A SEAT.

ABOUT THIS SUBPEONA, KIM, I'M NOT TRYING TO INTERFERE WITH YOUR INVESTIGATION. I JUST WANT TO BRING JOHNNY'S KILLER TO JUSTICE. YOU UNDERSTAND THAT!

BUT YOU'RE NOT SHARING INFORMATION WITH ME, ROGER. I'VE BEEN PUTTING A CASE TOGETHER AGAINST THE FACE FOR THREE MONTHS!

THEN YOUR AGENCY GETS INVOLVED, AND JOHNNY'S DEAD, RUSTY'S STICKING HIS NOSE EVERYWHERE, THE FACE'S DAUGHTER RIPS OFF HIS COCAINE DROP, AND THIS MASKED CHARACTER CALLED THE SCYTHE STARTS BEATING UP ON THE BUTTON MAN!

ATTORNEY
I'M NOT GETTING COOPERATION FROM ANYONE. I WANT TO KNOW WHERE ALEX SCHUYLER IS. THERE'S A CONTRACT OUT ON HIM, YOU KNOW.

IF I KNEW WHERE HE WAS, I'D BE ABLE TO COLLECT FROM MY CLIENT.

DON'T BULLSHIT ME, ROGER. I KNOW YOUR CLIENT IS SCHUYLER'S SISTER, AND I ALSO KNOW THAT YOU'RE NOT CHARGING HER A PENNY!

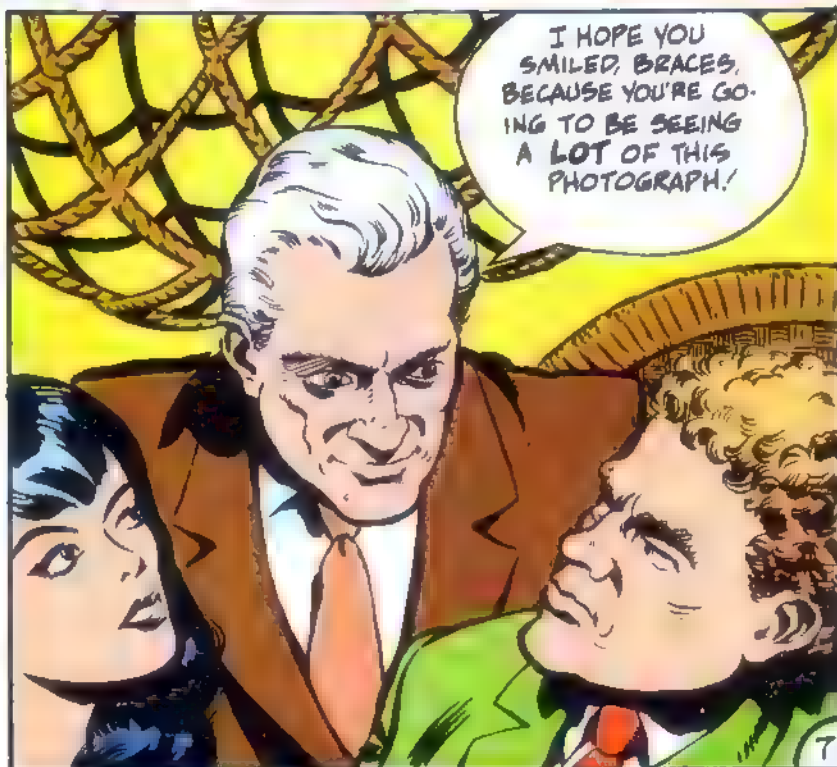
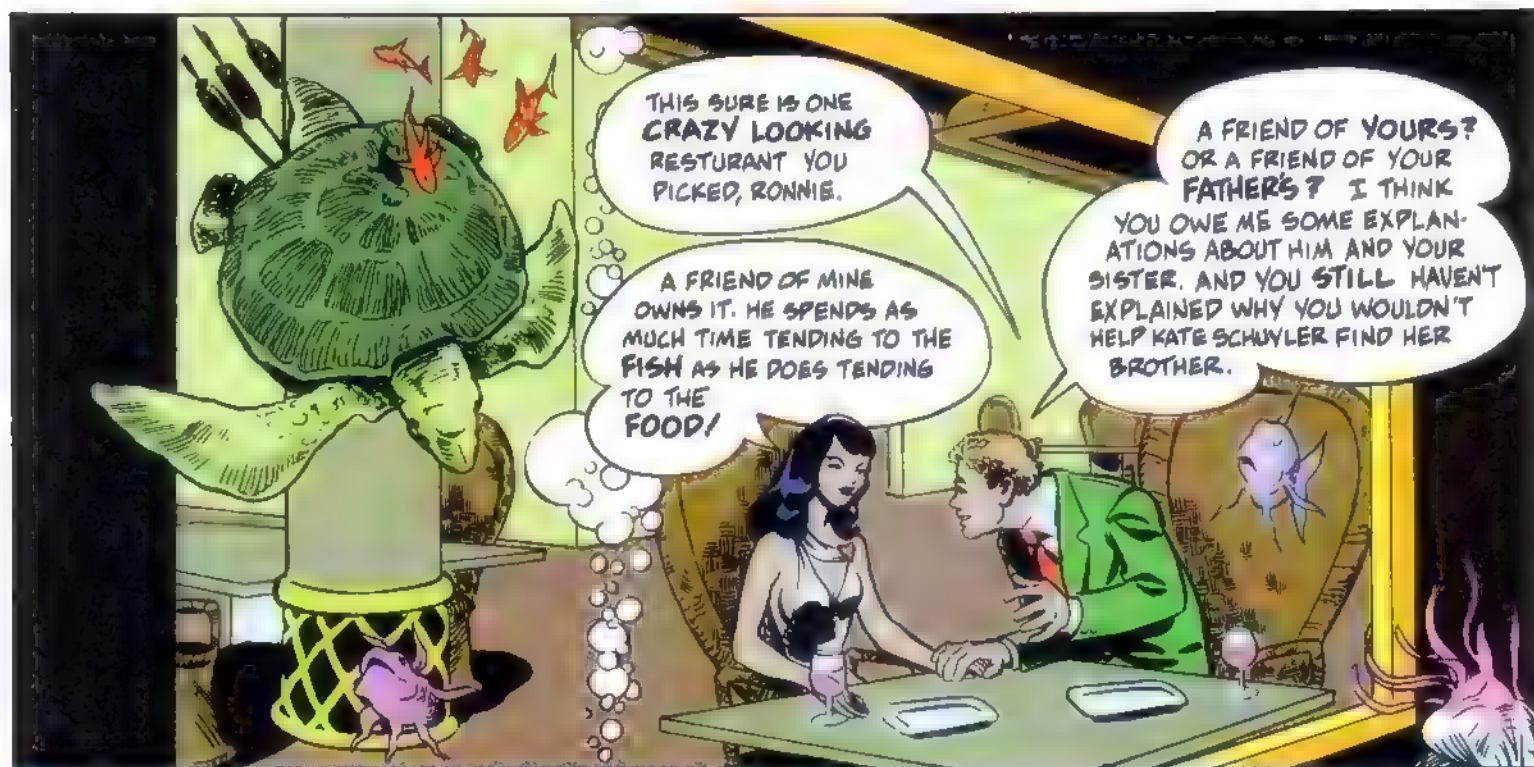
UH...

YOU'D BETTER KEEP YOUR NOSE CLEAN, ROGER. THE FACE IS FURIOUS NOW THAT HIS COCAINE CONNECTION HAS BEEN SEVERED AND HE'S LOOKING TO TAKE IT OUT ON ANYONE WHO GETS IN HIS WAY.

I'LL TELL RUSTY WHEN I SEE HIM.

I SUGGEST YOU WARN "THE SCYTHE" TOO. AND WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, TELL HIM HE'S NOT FOOLING ANYONE WITH THAT MASK!

DISTRICT ATTORNEY



MEANWHILE, IN A RITZY APARTMENT BUILDING ON THE UPPER EAST SIDE...

OH! YOU MUST BE FROM THE AGENCY! GOOD! I'M GLAD YOU COULD COME OVER IMMEDIATELY! AS I TOLD YOU, IT'S URGENT! URGENT!

I AM GEN KAKU! BUT I'M NOT JAPANESE! I AM A KOREAN! I CAN PROVE IT! IMMEDIATELY, IF YOU WISH!

UH...NO, THAT'S OKAY. WE BELIEVE YOU. I'M MASON; THIS IS CHANTILLY. WHAT DO YOU NEED A BODYGUARD FOR?

FOR MY WORD PROCESSOR, OF COURSE! IT'S URGENT! DID I TELL YOU THAT? GOOD!

I WANT YOU TO WATCH IT ALL NIGHT--PROTECT IT! WHILE I SLEEP AT NIGHT, SOMEONE COMES IN HERE AND ADDS GIBBERISH--GIBBERISH--IN THE MIDDLE OF MY SCRIPTS! GIBBERISH!

I'M NOT QUITE SURE I...

MASON, THIS GUY'S NUTS!

IT TAKES ME HOURS--HOURS--TO UNDO THEIR SABOTAGE. BY THE TIME I DO, I CAN'T CONCENTRATE! I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO TURN IN A SCRIPT FOR WEEKS! THE STUDIO IS FURIOUS! PLEASE! HELP ME!

AND SO, LATE THAT NIGHT...

BANZAI!!

GIBBERISH... GIBBERISH...

Stay Tuned!

UNIQUE



by Scott McCloud

COMING IN MARCH
FROM ECLIPSE

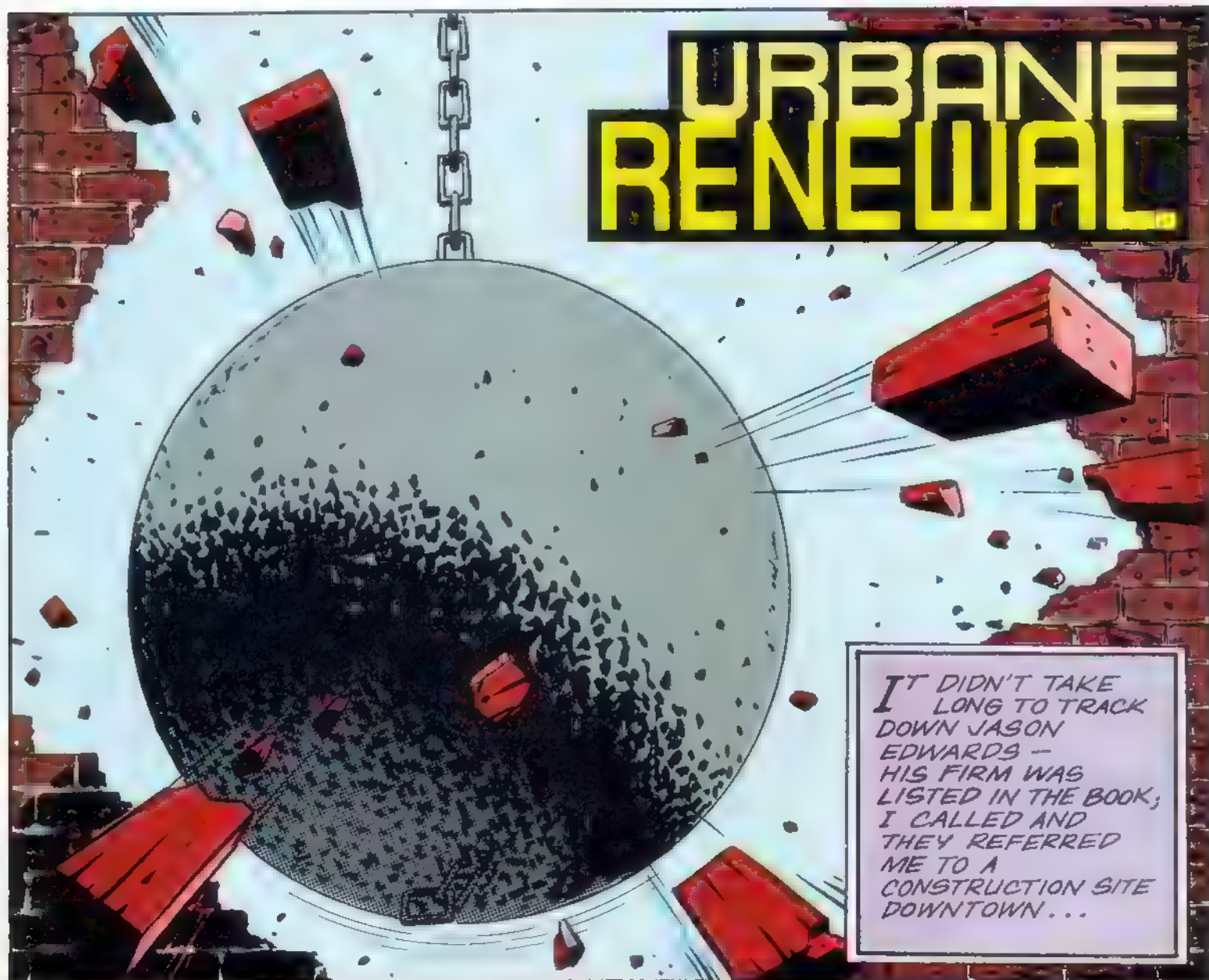
MS. TREE

© 1983

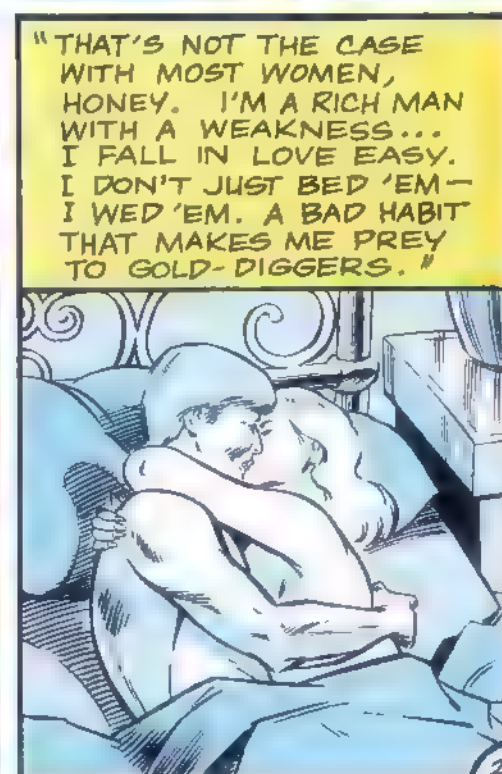
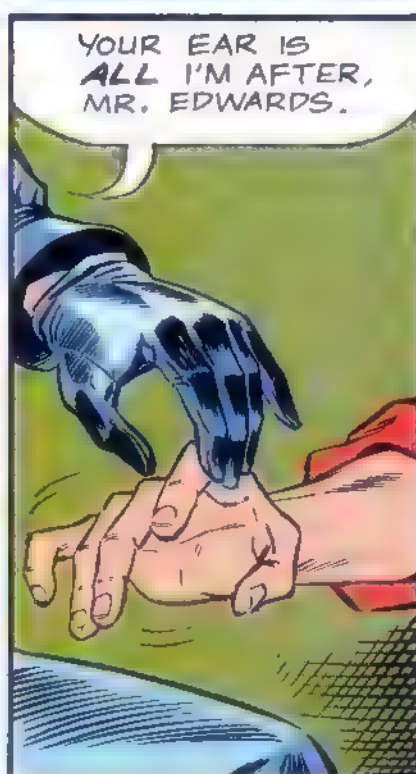
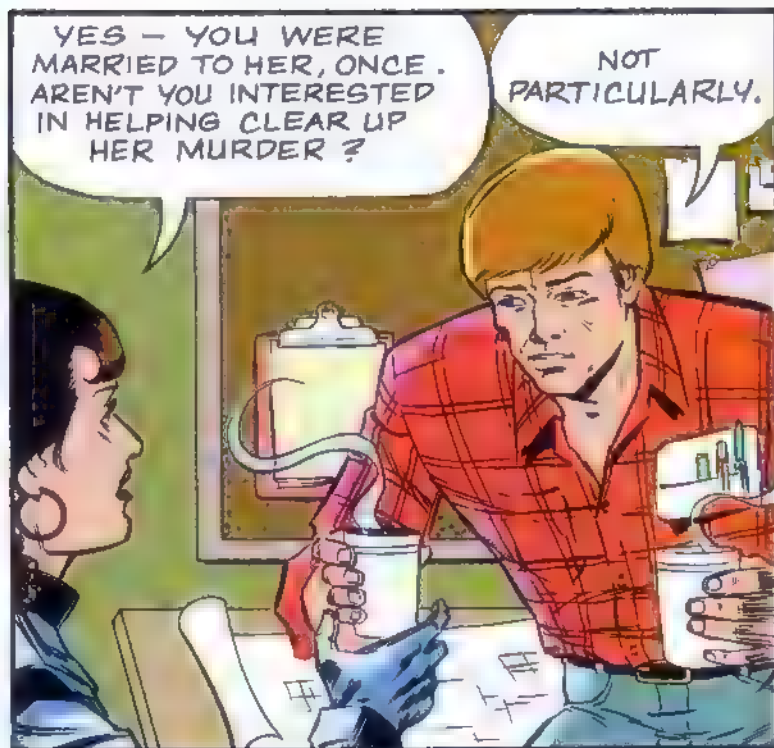
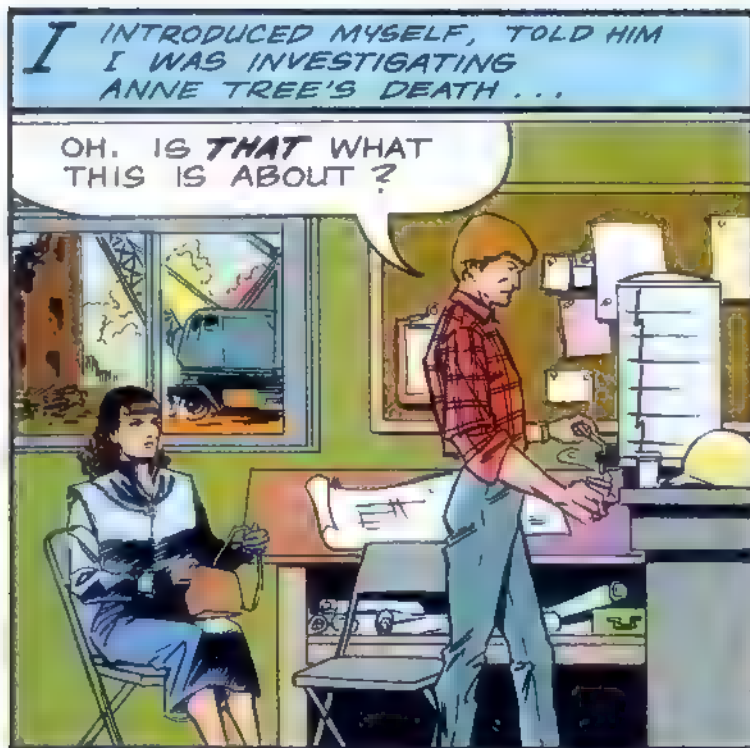
Max Collins and Terry Beatty

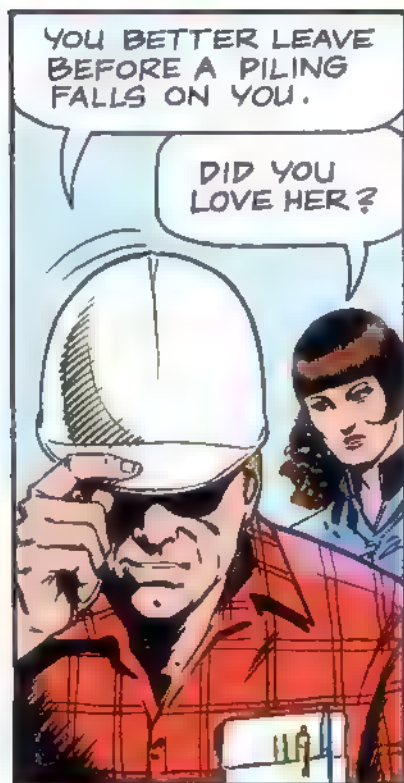
"THE COLD DISH"

Chapter Six



ART ASSIST & LETTERING: GARY KATO / EDITOR: DEAN M. / COLORS: DENIS McFARLING







I KNOW SHE HAS
A SON.
I WAS HIS
STEFFATHER, FOR...

FOR A TIME.
DON'T YOU
WONDER
WHAT BECAME
OF THE BOY?



I SUPPOSE THE
GRANDPARENTS
HAVE HIM.

NO.
I HAVE HIM.



YOU?

GOOD
AFTERNOON,
MR. EDWARDS.
I'LL LET YOU
GET BACK TO
DESTROYING
THINGS...



I STOPPED BY TO SEE
LT. RAFA VALER
OF HOMICIDE...

WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME
ANNE TREE HAD BEEN
MARRIED A SECOND TIME?

I DIDN'T
KNOW IT
MYSELF.

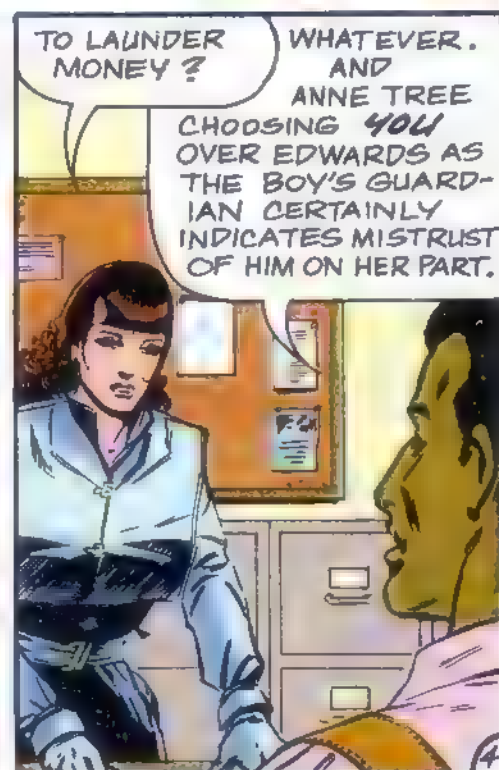


THE HELL OF IT IS I **DID** —
ANNE TREE MENTIONED IT IN
PASSING TO ME, ONCE, AND I
COMPLETELY FORGOT ABOUT
IT... TILL MRS. BOOKER
REMINDS ME.

INTERESTING
INFORMATION,
NONETHELESS.



THE MUERTA
CONNECTION THERE
IS A **CERTAINTY** —
EDWARDS INVESTED
HIS DOUGH IN THAT
CONSTRUCTION
FIRM, FELL ON
HARD TIMES A
RECESSION OR TWO
AGO, AND MUERTA
MOVED IN...



TO LAUNDER
MONEY?

WHATEVER.
AND
ANNE TREE

CHOOSING **YOU**
OVER EDWARDS AS
THE BOY'S GUARD-
IAN CERTAINLY
INDICATES MISTRUST
OF HIM ON HER PART.

I WANTED TO TALK TO MIKE JR. ABOUT JASON EDWARDS -- CHECK OUT THE BOY'S ATTITUDE TOWARD HIS ONE-TIME STEPFATHER...



BUT FIRST I HAD A STOP TO MAKE...



YEAH -- WHADDYA WANT?



YOU WITNESSED THE HIT-AND-RUN SLAYING OF ANNE TREE.

YEAH. SO?



SO SOMEBODY OBVIOUSLY PAID YOU TO LIE.

HEY...



AND I'M WILLING TO PAY YOU TO FIND OUT WHO --

I, UH... DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKIN' ABOUT ... BUT COME IN--



SUPPOSE SOMEBODY DID PAY ME TO STRETCH THE TRUTH? WHAT WOULD YOU PAY ME TO BEND IT BACK?

NO BEER, THANKS. BUT MAYBE YOU'D LIKE \$100?

Wanna Beer?



THAT'S CHICKENFEED. THIS IS A **BIG DEAL**, BABE — AND THAT CALLS FOR BIG BREAD.

Wanna Sandwich?



NO THANKS. BUT YOU'RE RIGHT THAT THIS IS A BIG DEAL — YOU OUGHT TO PAY **ME** TO PROTECT YOU FROM AN ACCESSORY RAP... BETTER SETTLE FOR THE \$100.



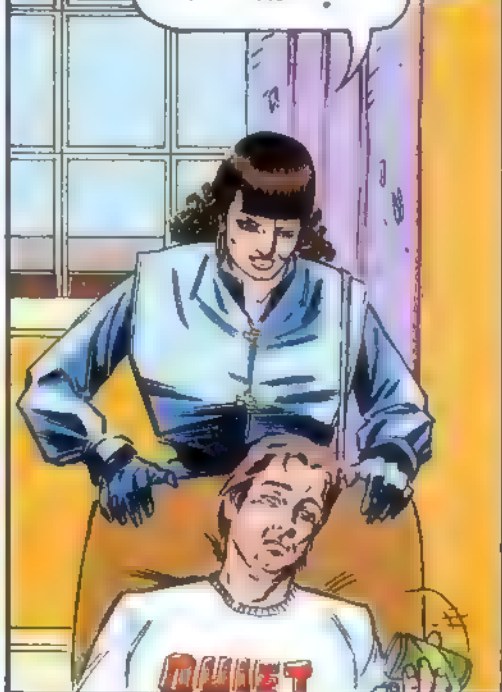
YOU MAY NOT BE AWARE THAT THE MAN WHO RAN ANNE TREE DOWN IS NOW DEAD **HIMSELF** —



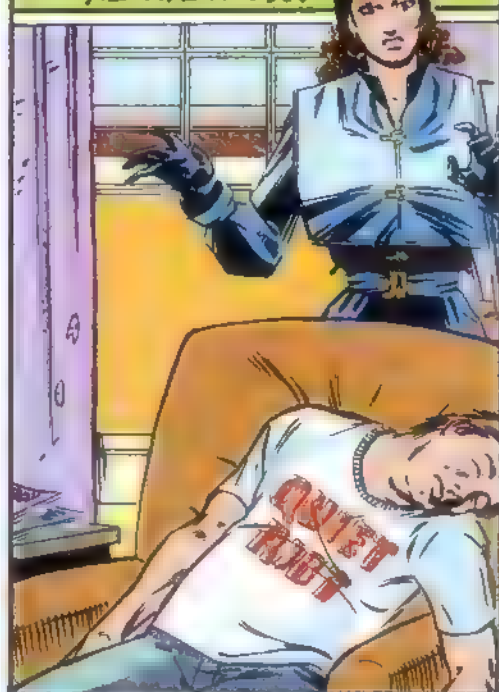
AND I OUGHT TO KNOW — I **SHOT** HIM!



ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME?



APPARENTLY HE WASN'T...



I COULDN'T SMELL ANYTHING BUT BEER — THOUGH THERE WAS MORE THAN HOPS AND MALT IN THIS STRANGE BREW —



JESUS, MS. TREE! THIS IS THE SECOND STIFF YOU'VE CALLED IN TODAY!

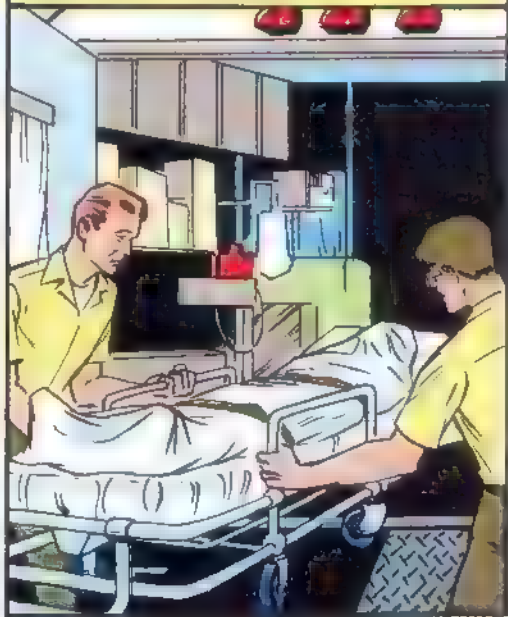
I DIDN'T KILL THIS ONE.



PUNCTURE IN THE TOP. A SYRINGE PUMPED THIS FULL OF SOMETHING TOXIC, YOU CAN BET. YOU AND THE BOYS BETTER NOT COOL OFF WITH ANY OTHER BEERS OUT OF **THAT** FRIDGE...



"WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THIS, MS. TREE?"
"MUERTA'S CLEANING UP AFTER HIMSELF."



AND I HELPED HIM BY REMOVING THE HIT-AND-RUN HITMAN. ANY WORD ON HIS IDENTITY?



HE'S FROM KANSAS CITY. NO CRIMINAL RECORD, BUT THERE'S A POSSIBLE MOB TIE-IN - HE OWNED FOUR XXX MOVIE HOUSES BACK THERE.



WHEN I GOT BACK TO THE "SAFE HOUSE" APARTMENT WHERE MIKE JR. WAS BEING TUTORED/BABY-SAT BY BODYGUARD BRYAN HAND, I GOT A WARMER RECEPTION THAN USUAL—



HI, MS. TREE. YOU WANNA SEE SOMETHING?

I FOUND THIS OLD SCRAPBOOK OF MY DAD'S - IT'S FULL OF PICTURES OF VIETNAM AND STUFF...



MY DAD WAS A NEAT GUY.

YES, MIKE. HE WAS A REAL NEAT GUY.



WHAT DID YOU THINK OF JASON EDWARDS, MIKE - YOUR STEPDAD - WAS HE NEAT?

HE GAVE ME STUFF. HE WAS OKAY.



WOULD YOU RATHER LIVE WITH HIM THAN ME?

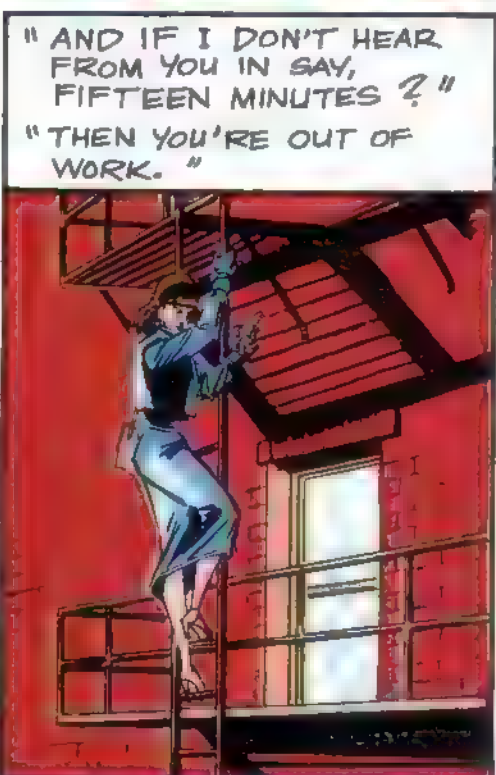
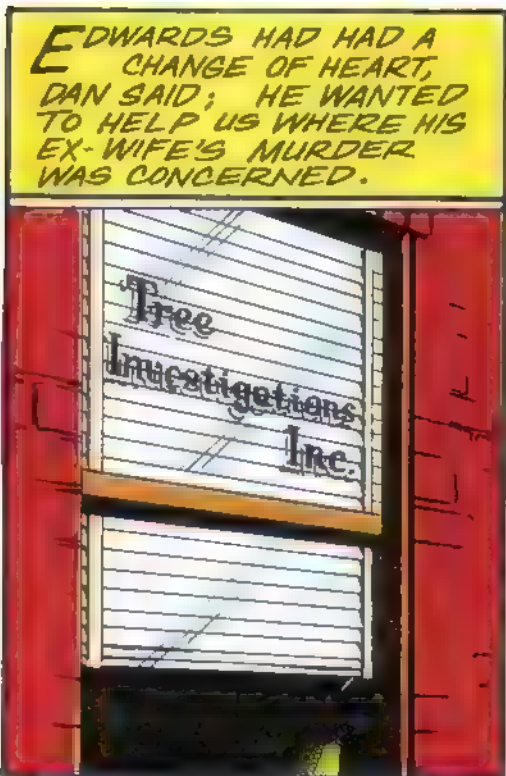
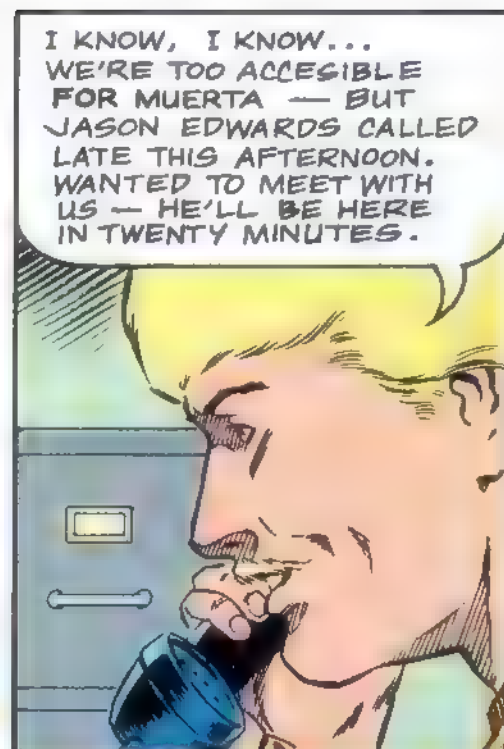
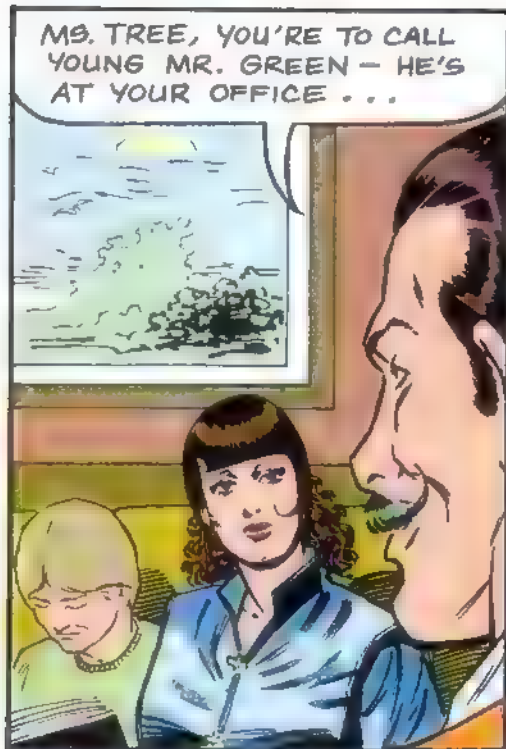


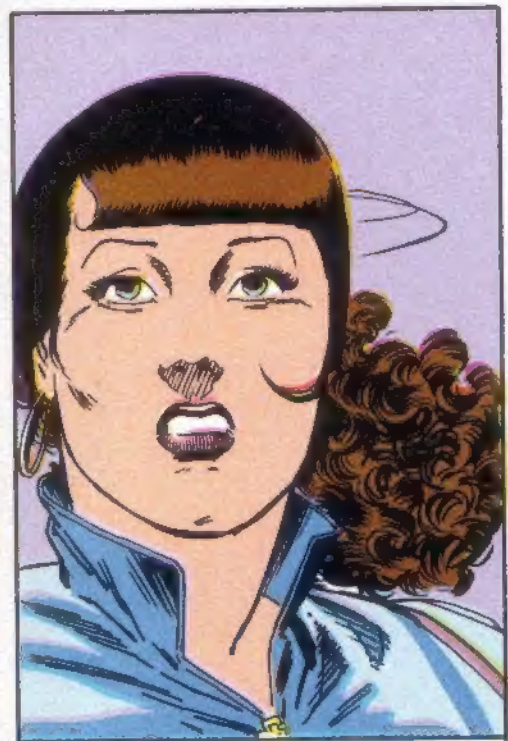
NOT REALLY.



I'D RATHER LIVE WITH MY GRANDPARENTS.







KAWOOM!



TO BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE —

"A winner"!
- CBG



**"Ah, fresh
air ... Good
stuff"!**
- HEAVY METAL



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comic in America

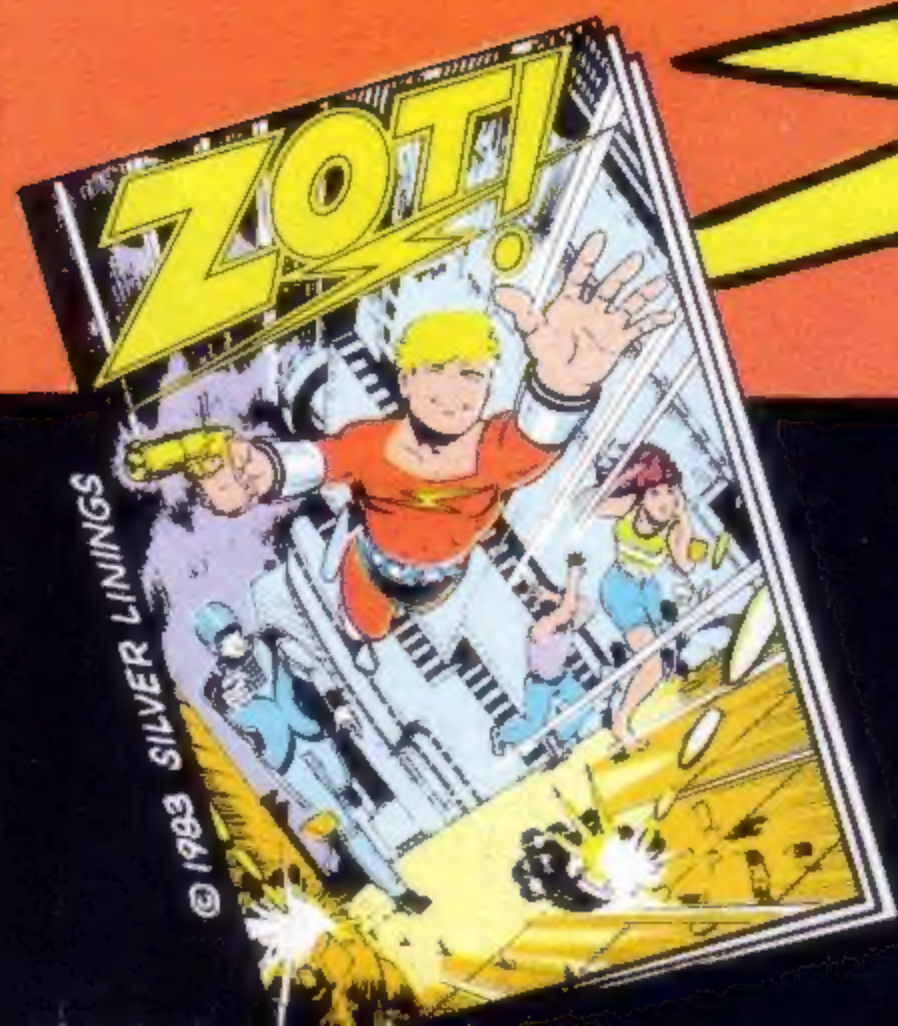


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AMAZING



by Scott McCloud

**COMING IN MARCH
FROM ECLIPSE**

